



3/100

A/x

17/6





A CHILD OF THE MENHIR

A Novel.

BY

AUSTIN CLARE

AUTHOR OF "THE CARVED CARTOON," ETC.

"Is the belief in an unconquerable Fate—an inexorable doom pursuing its victim from father to son—compatible with a creed whose God is Love? To think so were to hold a religion essentially pagan, for all its thin veil of Christianity—like that which in Brittany baptized the heathen menhirs, and built a Calvary over the place where human victims had been offered to the ruthless gods of the old world—changing the name, but keeping the nature. Fate may seem strong, but God and Love are stronger than Fate."

In Three Volumes.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1882.

[All rights reserved.]

823
C54c
v.1

MAN 27 1952 2.6.1044501

To Clarghyll,

AND

ALL THOSE, WHETHER NEAR OR FAR,

WHO CALL IT HOME,

I dedicate this,

MY FIRST FRUITS IN THE NOVEL FIELD.

Ed. Mrs. Ray : Dec. 56 (1956) - 5v

P R E F A C E.

“Good wine needs no bush,” says Chaucer; and a story fit for anything should tell its own tale without much introduction. Whether this be bad or good remains to be seen; it is the materials, not the story itself, which I wish to introduce. These were in part gathered during a visit to Brittany—that province where romance and superstition linger, perhaps, more lovingly than in any other corner of Nineteenth Century Europe,—but for some I am indebted to other sources.

Monsieur Emile Souvestre, in his charming chronicles of his native province:—*Les Derniers Bretons, Le Foyer Breton, En Bretagne, &c.*—has furnished me with many an interesting particular concerning manners, customs, legends, and character: Mr. Tom Taylor’s notes to *Ballads and Songs of Brittany* have supplied others; and in one or other of these works will be found the translations of Breton poems which have been introduced into the story. The curious superstition which gives its name to the novel, namely, that which, among other weird attributes, ascribe that of paternity to the mysterious

Menhir, is alluded to in Bradshaw's *Handbook of Brittany*. Tales have been told of children who have grown up under the withering imputation of mingled human and demon parentage. Why not, then, tell one about a reputed Child of the Menhir? To this story, accordingly, I now leave the Reader.

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.—THE LITTLE GUEST OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

ON CARNAC PLAIN	1
-----------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

CHAPTER II.

SAINT CHRISTOPHER	11
-------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER III.

ANTONN COMORRE'S QUIVER	21
-------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHEPHERDS' HOLIDAY	27
------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER V.

TWO LITTLE SHEPHERDS AND A SHEPHERDESS	40
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER VI.

FOSTER-BROTHERS	45
-----------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER VII.

KEEPING HIS EASTER	48
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY OF THE DEAD	56
---------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHAPTER IX.

“MY FATHER”	68
-------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

BOOK II.—THE PILLAWER.

CHAPTER I.

ARISTOCRATIC	85
--------------	----

CHAPTER II.

THE CHEVALIER DE KERDEC'H	92
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

“IT HAUNTS ME LIKE A PHANTOM”	101
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN-TRODDEN	112
--------------	-----

CHAPTER V.

A STROKE OF BUSINESS	121
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI.

SAINT-SAMSON	131
--------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.

A DARK HOUR	153
-------------	-----

BOOK III.—THE OUTCAST.

CHAPTER I.

POORER THAN POOR	159
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER II.

A TERRIBLE RUMOUR	169
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER III.

HAUNTED AND HUNTED	176
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IV.

TIRED OUT	181
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER V.

"THE HUSKS THAT THE SWINE DID EAT"	185
--	-----

CHAPTER VI.

THE MILLER	193
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.

SEEN IN THE MOONLIGHT	201
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

A SON OF ROHAN	211
--------------------------	-----

BOOK I.

The Little Guest of God.

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR.

BOOK I.—THE LITTLE GUEST OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

ON CARNAC PLAIN.

“ Voit-on chez vous les loups-garous
Rôder dans les bruyères ?
Voit-on la nait errer sans bruit
Les lavandières ?
Voit-on parmi les ajones blonds
Les Korigans danser en ronds ?
Entend-on crier les ressorts
Du sombre chariot des morts ?
Voit-on les noirs menhirs se dresser sur vos landes ?
Avez-vous des dolmens au gigantasque aspect ?”

—*Les deux Bretagnes.*

A WILD moon shone on a wild scene. Above, great black cloud masses drifted across the sky, now shutting out her light, now catching her rays, and scattering, as it were, loose silver as they tossed them one to the other, mingled with thin flights of tiny snow-flakes, which went fluttering across the wind-swept spaces of the air. Below, in the moments of brightness, was revealed a scene no less weird than that above.

Stretching north, east, west, as far as the eye could reach, was a great brown moor, storm-blown and dreary as imagination could picture, hemmed in towards the south by a hoary line, dimly suggestive of a distant shore, from whence the dull thud of beating waves sounded, pulse-like, in the silence.

And what are those dim forms of gigantic stature which occupy the moor?

Whole armies of them stand there, row on row, circle on circle, battalion on battalion, like soldiers on the watch for an enemy. But never did mortal warriors stand so still; never were mortal forms so grim, so cold, so rigid; never was mortal patience so dumb and untiring. For this spectral army has stood there for centuries—nay, for cycles of centuries, waiting for an enemy which never comes, or else has come and gone, and may perchance come again from the dim womb of the future. Generations of men and women have lived, and loved, and died around, and are but as mushroom crops to these hoary giants, whose origin no one rightly knows, but is content to call them simply *menhirs* and *dolmens*,* and to speak of them in whispers round winter fires, half wondering, half in awe; for this is one of the haunted regions of Breton story—the far-famed plain of Carnac. If you were to ask one of the natives who had brought these giant stones, he would probably tell you that they were the soldiers who were pursuing Saint Corneille, patron of the parish, and who were petrified for their

* *Menhirs*, lit., long stones. *Dolmans*, stone tables.

sacrilege. Another would cross himself and answer that they were set there by *Guillom Coz*—that is to say, “Old William,” one of the many popular names for the Devil in Brittany. A third, of softer faith, might reply that Madame la Vierge had carried them there in her apron ; while a fourth would aver that it was none of these, but simply the *korigans* (pixies), who had built with them their ball-room, or general place of assembly ; that is, if the stones did not come there of their own accord, which he for one was by no means prepared to deny.

As for antiquarians, opinions differ with them almost as widely, and though each may stoutly maintain his own opinion, few agree as to whether the menhirs and dolmans were temples, altars, and objects of adoration to the priests of a long-vanished religion, or have served as tombstones to some ancient burying-place or antique battle-field.

Be this as it may, the Bretons look on Carnac and its pillars as haunted ground, and few will adventure themselves within the giant lines and circles after nightfall, or will pass them by in the waning day, without first signing themselves with the Holy Cross. Matelinn Gourven (though he had little reputation for peculiar reverence in the country around, and though his profession led him across the most desolate regions at all hours of the day) felt a strange thrill pass over him as he came in sight of the stony outposts ; and his hand, though not too clean in any sense, mechanically traced the sign on breast and brow.

His was a figure often to be seen, especially on the highways and byways of the country. He wore the wide baggy trousers confined below the knee, called *bragou-braz*, the loose vest, and the broad slouching hat, which is the old costume of Brittany. But the breeches were soiled and torn, the vest faded and threadbare, and the hat browned and bent by constant exposure to the weather. Not less browned and rugged was the dark, keen-eyed face, looking out from the shaggy locks of hair which fell upon his shoulders. And there was a hard, cunning look about the thin lips, which must have clung to them even when they whined for bread, in the name of all the saints, at the doors of the farmhouses ; for as his staff and wallet testified, Matelinn Gourven was a professional beggar, or *klaskervara* (seeker of bread), as the name is in Brittany.

The superstition which clung about the place would have made even Matelinn prefer not to pass that way so late ; but unfortunately he had been stopped too long by the attractions of the cider at a wayside inn, and the night had fallen upon him before he could reach the village on the other side of the plain.

With heart beating a little faster, he neared the outposts, passed some dozens of the giant sentinels without hearing or seeing anything peculiar, and was beginning to congratulate himself on his bravery, when suddenly he stopped short as though he had been shot, and the cold dew broke out on his swarthy brow.

What was that? Surely something moved beneath that tall menhir in the centre of the line? Surely something very like a human wail mingled with the moaning of the wind. Was it a *korigan*? If so, more were sure to appear before long; and Matelinn felt his limbs tremble as he thought how they would force him into their magic circle and compel him to dance with them till cock-crow. But, no; it was too large for a *korigan*. A momentary relief crept into the soul of the klaskervara, only to vanish again, as a still more horrible fear, suggested by the flutter of a white garment caught by a puff of eddying wind, took possession of him. It was a *kannérez-noz*. Yes, without doubt it was that; and the white linen was his own winding sheet, which the phantom washerwoman of the night was hanging out to dry. Horrors! And was this he, Matelinn Gourven, who had dared to laugh that very afternoon over his cider at a comrade's story of how an ancestor of his had met the *kannérez-noz* in returning from a *Pardon*,* and having been drawn into helping to wring out her linen, had been twisted to death himself! Oh! if the saints would only protect him, and aid him to escape unhurt this time, he would never be so profane as to mock at *kannérez-noz* or *korigan* again.

Meanwhile the wailing voice still continued, and the flutter, flutter of the white linen could be seen every time

* A *Pardon* is a combination of religious festival and fair, so called because the saint whose day is celebrated has certain indulgences attached to his shrine for the benefit of pilgrims.

the moon shone out. Matelinn would fain have fled ; that he felt utterly unable to follow his wishes was, of course, due to enchantment—there could be no doubt about that. Suddenly, another voice, shriller and more piercing even than the first, joined in the wail, and well-nigh froze the blood in the creeping veins of the klaskervara. In an agony of terror he fell on his knees, and appealed to all the saints in the Breton Calendar whose names he could remember.

“Oh, Saint Martin ! Saint Gueoroc ! Saint Corentin ! Saint Vouga ! Saint Koledok ! protect me ! Save me from Mesdames les *Kannérez-noz*, and Messieurs les *Korigans*, and I will vow a taper—yes, a taper of the best wax—to the shrine of Sainte-Anne D’Aurez !”

His trembling lips had only uttered this prayer half-loud, but, nevertheless, it seemed to have attracted the attention of the nocturnal washerwoman, or washer-women, if, indeed, as the klaskervara suspected, there was more than one in his neighbourhood. The wailing stopped. Could he have given offence in that quarter by his prayer to the Saints ? The idea sent the cold dew again to his brow. And yet he had been so careful to speak respectfully of them !

For a moment there was dead silence among the spectral stones. Only the night wind sobbed and whispered to the withered grass and dead heather which grew at their feet ; then the first voice was lifted again in a tone of infinite

sadness, and this time, Matelinn fancied that it was pronouncing words. He listened, fully believing that in the pauses of the wind he should be able to distinguish the traditional chant of the *kannérez-noz* :—

“ Quen na zui Kristen salver,
Rede goëlc’hi hon licer
Didan an earc’h ag an aër.”*

The wind lulled for a moment, and words came indeed to the ear of the klaskervara, but not the words he expected. Surely they were not *Breton* words at all? They reminded him of something he had heard in his better days, when he had gone regularly to Church. He listened more keenly still, and with a strange wonder recognised the *De profundus*. A *kannérez-noz* in prayer! This was something he had never heard of. A doubt dawned slowly on him as the passionate, agonising voice repeated a supplication, which surely is, as it were, the essential oil of misery, drained and wrung out to the very dregs. Nowhere else does anguish speak in words like these, whose very fewness shows the utter depth from which the cry ascends.

As she prayed, the figure raised herself from the shadow and fell forward on her knees into the moonlight; and then Matelinn saw the face—white, drawn, exhausted of all that is pleasant in life; and yet, surely—no, it was *not* the face of the dead! Matelinn came a little nearer. The figure

* If no Christian come to save us,
We must ever bleach our shroud
Under the snow and the wind.

saw him, gave a gasping start, and fell down beneath the shadow of the menhir.

“In the name of all the saints, what are you?” asked the klaskervara, unable to keep silence any longer, especially now that his superstitious fears were lessening.

There was no answer, only a voice—it seemed to be that of a child—cried out of the darkness.

At the voice, the figure, crouching below the menhir, raised itself slightly, and stretched out its hands ; it seemed to struggle for speech !

“What ails you?” asked Matelinn, who, now ascertaining that the apparition was human—a woman apparently, in the last stage of exhaustion—had quite recovered his composure.

He bent over her, and a start seemed to go through his wiry frame, as he saw her features nearer. She opened her failing eyes, and a strange, wild look distended them, as they fell on Matelinn’s face.

“You !”

“You !”

The pronoun, pronounced in Breton by the woman and the man, broke for a moment the voiceless silence of the great lone waste ; then it closed again as suddenly, and nothing spoke but the wind.

Those two, and God only besides, knew what strange recognition had taken place among the menhirs.

A fatal exhaustion seemed to be creeping over the

woman ; but again she roused herself at the voice beside her, stooped to one side, and, by a supreme effort, clasped what seemed to be a little brown bundle in her arms, and held it towards the klaskervara.

“ For God’s sake—at least—the child ! ”

The death-rattle half choked the last word ! The look of supplication faded from the eyes ;—they glazed slowly, and the head fell back against the stone pillar. The little brown bundle rolled upon the grass !

Matelinn stood watching. Presently he bent down again, and, seeing that all was over, moved the body where fuller light could fall upon it. A gleam, as of gold, flashed from under the broad white linen collar which covered the shoulders and the upper part of the breast. The hand of the klaskervara felt there, and drew out a gold cross, the usual heirloom of every Bretonne, not absolutely poor. Then he searched further, detached the rosary, and closely scanned the pale limp hands which were fast stiffening in death ; but every finger was ringless.

The clothes he examined, but there was nothing worth taking there ; all were too deeply signed with poverty. For a moment his eyes lingered on the long brown hair, which had fallen from under the white winged cap worn by the dead woman. He took it between his fingers, as though to feel its texture ; but it seemed to send a shudder through him, for he let it drop suddenly, lifted the body in his arms, and walked slowly to one of the dolmans, or stone

grottos, which lay within the outposts. Within this he laid the dead, and returned to the tall menhir. The little brown bundle still lay there, but there was no cry now. It was nestling close to the giant stone, asleep or dead, Matelinn could not tell which. But there was no time to ascertain now; the clouds were gathering more thickly about the moon, and the snowflakes, which before had been but as feathers scattered occasionally, were beginning to fall more steadily. Taking the foundling of the menhir up in his arms, the klaskervara grasped his staff and struck across the moor.

CHAPTER II.

SAINT CHRISTOPHER.

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”—*Shakespeare*.

“DEAD, dead! Oh! my little innocent—my little white flower—how art thou sleeping under the cold sod—my little sweet heart, my angel child? Dost think it *very* cruel in thy mother to leave thee there, baby? Oh! God, that it should be so! His place was on my bosom, my sweet darling—there, there in my arms, so warm, so soft—*can* it be that thou art here no longer?—that I shall *never* see thy smile again, nor kiss thy lips? What have I done that God should take my only one—my first-born, my very heart’s life? *What* have I said? Oh! blessed Virgin, help me! Do not let my wicked words be heard up there! Mother of God! thou didst lose thy Son; thou knowest—thou only knowest how hard it is!”

The mother let her head drop on her knees and rocked herself backwards and forwards, in grief that would not be comforted. And yet comfort seemed there in plenty.

The fire burnt warm and bright in the great open fireplace of the Breton farm-kitchen. There were marks of

worldly comfort and well-being on every side ; the handsome dark oak presses and chairs, the rafters laden with provisions, the antique silver drinking cups on the shelf, which must have come down from father to son—all showed that the inhabitants were people of substance, and that not of yesterday.

Ninorc'h Comorre was, indeed, one of the richest *fermières* in the district ; but the cradle by her side was empty, and she only thought of that. Outside, the wind blew drearily across the plains ; homeless wanderers were there who would have given their right hands for the shelter of a roof, for the shade of the clustering trees, for the screen of mantling ivy which clung round Ninorc'h's window, and tapped, tapped, like restless fingers, against the panes. On the sea, scarce a mile from the sheltered farmstead, fishermen tossed in their frail boats, wet with spray, chilled with the wind, and prayed to God in the touching Breton phrase :—

“ My God protect me ! my boat is so small and Thy sea is so great ! ”

Ninorc'h, sitting securely by the warm fire-side, seemed worthy of envy to many. The sailors' and fishermen's wives, trudging past her door with heavy hearts for their men at sea, compared her lot with theirs, and sighed, poor hearts, little knowing. But she only thought of the empty cradle and of the little new-made grave in the village church-yard.

Nor was she alone. The comfort did not all come from dumb objects; it was not all *creature*-comfort—human consolation was hers, too.

Antonn Comorre stood beside his wife, with his hand on her shoulder and a distressed look on his honest face; from time to time putting in a word as it occurred to him; and, if his less sensitive man's heart could not feel the death of the infant of days so deeply as the mother did, at least he lamented it very sincerely, and truly compassionated his wife.

But Ninorc'h only thought of the empty cradle.

“Cheer up, little wife,” said Antonn, at last, a new aspect of the case dawning upon him.

“Cheer up, it's the first, certainly, but maybe it'll not be the last. Eh, little wife! Truly, it's sad, sad indeed, and inconvenient, too—a full ten days before Madame la Comtesse can come with the child thou wert to nurse for her. Hey! Ninorc'h, I hadn't thought of that! Truly, I don't wonder thou takest on more than common. It's not only the loss of the child, it's the loss of the foster-son as well, and that means the loss of what would have well made up for the bad harvest. Hey! Ninorc'h, is there no child thou could'st get in the village, just to keep the place of the young Count ready for him till he comes to take it himself? Think, Ninorc'h, is there no one? Madame la Comtesse was set on having thee, and no one else, to nourish the little *monsieur*, and think if thou hadst to refuse, after all.”

Poor Ninorc'h, she only sobbed the more at this. Antonn was cruel—cruel even to *think* of any loss but just that of the little angel himself; and yet Antonn, honest fellow, had not meant it so. Rich as he was accounted among the farmers of Carnac, he would have seemed poor enough to many of his brethren of the spade in England; and the bad harvest of last autumn, not to mention the rates and taxes, which grew heavier every year, had pinched him more sorely than Ninorc'h knew. And so she sat and sobbed, and thought him cruel and unfeeling; and he, feeling the loss of his first-born all the time, stood by and looked into the fire, chewing the cud of bitter thought, and wishing that women were more reasonable. And the snow drove past the windows in wild white wreaths, and the wind tossed the branches of the trees, and the ivy tapped, tapped against the panes—tapped, so that Antonn and Ninorc'h did not hear how, among it all, Fate came and tapped at their door.

Presently, however, Fate, or whoever the personage outside might be, became impatient, and a heavy rap which could not be mistaken, sounded on the oak panels. Antonn moved towards the door, drew the bolts and opened it. A figure, white with snow from head to foot, stood there.

“In the name of God and the saints!” he said, “a night’s lodging and a morsel of food!”

“Welcome,” responded Antonn, with the Breton hospi-

tality for "the guests of God," as in their speech they name the poor and homeless.

The snow-covered wanderer entered promptly, never doubting his welcome; bent his head towards the woman by the hearth, and uttered the customary salutation:—

"May God bless all those who are here!"

"And yourself," responded Antonn, making a sign to the wanderer to seat himself by the fire. But the latter stood still in the middle of the floor, hesitating.

"Madame," he said, looking at Ninorc'h, "for the sake of the blessed Saint Nicholas, patron of boys, have pity on this infant! I commend him to your charity. Though, indeed, whether it be boy or maid, it passes me to say."

Ninorc'h raised her head, and fixed her hungry eyes on the little brown bundle, powdered with white, which the seeker of bread held out towards her. There was a struggle in the mother's heart; pity and jealousy strove there. Why should another woman's child be alive while hers was dead? —hers so loved, so cherished, taken in spite of her love!—this, a beggar's brat, left, in spite of what, most probably, was anything but love! The bitter question woke and tried to close her heart against the little guest of God who stood at its door and knocked. But pity conquered. The little face, which was all that could be seen of the child, looked so white, so pinched, so deathlike; yes, in that latter quality, it looked so like what her baby did when, the last

struggle over, it lay lifeless in her arms. Good God ! could it be so, indeed ?

Ninorc'h sprang up.

“Holy Virgin !” she exclaimed in a broken voice, “Give it to me. Does it yet live ?”

With trembling fingers she unrolled the brown covering, a woman’s cloak of the coarse material worn by peasants, and sat down again by the fire, chafing the rigid limbs in her warm fingers.

Antonn looked well pleased.

“Hey, Matelinn Gourven,” he said, presently, turning to his guest, “So it’s you, man ? Name of Saint Corneille ! I did not recognise you, such an old man had the snow made of you ! Nothing like the fire for making one young again when it’s only of that sort of hoar hairs there is question ! Faith of a Christian, you looked venerable, man—venerable as the good Dom* Cleméñz himself ; and *that* you’ll never be, Matelinn Gourven, should you live to the age of the holy Noah !”

“*Vertuz*,† but that’s a hard speech to a Christian, Antonn Comorre ! What would you have, then ? A seeker of bread must live. Holy Virgin ! but it’s a hard life—a hard life ; and, if it were not for the goodness of the Christians —”

“There, there, Matelinn ! that’ll do ; we know the rest,

* *Dom*, dominus. Old title for a parish priest.

† *Vertue* ! A Breton exclamation.

my good Matelinn ; and betwixt old acquaintances, one dispenses with ceremony—Hey? But, see ! the child is coming round. Verily, a fine boy, if somewhat elfish-looking. Thine own, Matelinn ?" (changing to the familiar pronoun, as a twinkle of fun lit in his dark, grey eye). " Hey, then, I did not know thou hadst married ; and Madame Matelinn Gourven—hast left her behind ?"

The face of the klaskervara darkened, and his hand involuntarily sought the beggar's staff which he had deposited beside him. But he checked himself, and the pious look which stood him in such good stead with the charitably-disposed, came back into his sharp little eyes.

"Jest not against Holy Charity," he said, in a reprobating voice. "A foundling, Antonn Comorre ! A foundling ! Would you have had me to leave the innocent to die amongst the menhirs ?—to die, or something worse ? May the Saints protect us !" He crossed himself, and Ninorc'h looked up, shuddering.

" Amongst the menhirs ?" she repeated, in a low voice. "Holy Virgin ! if it should be a *poulpican* ! " *

Antonn smiled.

"No, no, goodwife ; human enough, methinks, by the way he cries. Hark ! one would almost fancy—" He stopped in time the reference to the dead babe, which would have re-opened the tear fount he was so glad to see

* Elf.

closed, for the moment at least, by this new claim on his wife's care.

"Ay, ay, human enough, I'll vouch ; but try the holy-water, if thou hast any misgivings—nothing uncanny'll stand that. So, so ! Best to be on the safe side—Hey, Matelinn ? No offence to you."

Ninorc'h dipped her fingers in the little holy water basin which hung below the image of the Virgin on the cottage wall, and signed the child on breast and brow, holding her breath the while in fear what might come of it. But nothing came ; nothing but a grave, sweet smile on the baby lips. Nothing happened more terrible than the holding out of baby arms towards her who had warmed it back to life.

Ninorc'h could not withstand that. She bent over the foundling lying in her lap, pressed her lips where the cross was still wet on the young brow, answering the cooing sounds, with which the infant greeted her caresses, by those inarticulate syllables of love which mothers use. Then—Antonn saw it with joy, though he was discreet enough to refrain from remark—the childless mother opened her bosom, drew to it the head of the motherless babe, and bending hers till the two almost touched, let fall a rain of tears on the short, soft curls—tears, warm and soft and gentle ; as different from the bitter drops, wrung from her by her bereavement, as are April showers from the storm-gusts of November ! It was as though those baby lips, those

blessed tears were drawing from heart and brain the aching trouble, the dull, hard pain, the rebelliousness of sorrow which had lodged there, and which all other comfort had seemed powerless to relieve ! It was to poor Ninorc'h as if a cloud so black, so heavy as even to hide from her the Saviour's face, had passed away, and truly—"whoso receiveth one such little child in My name, receiveth Me."

"A Child of the Menhir!—nameless, base-born!—ay, so it may be," murmured Antonn, reflectively, "but it's a blessed messenger to poor Ninorc'h—a God-send, as Dom Cleméñz would say—ay, that's what it is ! And come in the nick of time, thanks be to our patron Saint Corneille, who has granted my wish the moment 'twas out of my mouth. The Holy Virgin be praised ! we'll not have to refuse the little monsieur now !"

"Antonn!" said Ninorc'h, aside to her husband next morning, as she saw the klaskervara stuffing into his wallet the crusts of black bread and hunch of goat's-milk cheese she had bestowed on him as a parting gift. "Antonn," she repeated, holding the child very close, and looking up with her wistful eyes, "we have food enough for three—is it not so?"

"Ay, little wife, and for four, too, God willing. Thou would'st keep the child—is it not so, Ninorc'h?"

"Ah, yes ; for has he not come to me as the Holy Babe to the blessed Saint Christopher? 'Twas God sent him to

us, Antonn ; my heart tells me so ; and I'd fain, fain, keep him for my own."

"So ? Well, then, in God's name, if Matelinn Gourven be willing."

Nor did the klaskervara say them nay.

CHAPTER III.

ANTONN COMORRE'S QUIVER.

“ Children, ay, forsooth,
They bring their own love with them when they come.”

JEAN INGELOW.—“ *Supper at the Mill.*”

“ VERILY Antonn and Ninorc'h Comorre did well to take in the little Christophe. Ah, yes, 'tis very true what good Dom Cleméngz is wont to preach. Holy Charity is its own reward—in that case at least.”

So said the gossips of Carnac as they passed by Antonn's little farm, and saw the children playing on the daisied grass before the door; and Antonn echoed their words, though with a half sigh.

“ Ay, wife, 'tis well we made the little lad our own, for I fear me there comes not another, at least——”

He looked at the group and broke off with another sigh, and the tears came into Ninorc'h's gentle eyes, as they followed her husband's.

And yet it was as fair a group as you could well see. There were four children there now. Tallest and strongest among them was Christophe, the Child of the Menhir (for “ Christophe ” had Ninorc'h caused him to be

baptized, in accordance with her idea that he had been sent to her as was the Christ-child to St. Christopher).

In the quiet, healthy atmosphere of the little farm at Carnac, the thin, elfish-looking infant which came to its door in the cold and storm of a winter's night twelve years ago, had flourished and grown into a boy, unusually large for one of his age and race. Yet he had the true Breton characteristics, though those perhaps of the Léonard, rather than of the inhabitant of the country round Carnac. The dark grey eyes which looked out from the black locks hanging about his face were solemn and dreamy, and yet full of a strange fire, which, though not easily provoked, would sometimes flash out in a manner that would frighten his more careless-natured playfellows.

His face was unusually long and dark of complexion, which perhaps accounted for the melancholy expression which always struck a stranger; for Christophe led too healthy and happy a life to have any cause for sadness. There was a tender look about the full red mouth, a gentleness, which almost belied the proud bearing of the head, the square set of the shoulders and broad strength of chest. Already the boy was a wrestler of fame among his comrades; but it was not always that he would put forth his power, and he liked better to sit with Antonn's sheep and Antonn's children on the solitary plain of Carnac, than to join in the rough sports of the village lads.

One comrade of his own age he had, dearly-loved as a brother, though so different from himself. This was the second child in the household group, still a frequent dweller at Carnac, though nominally he had done with the care of his foster-parents, and was supposed to be pursuing his studies at Rennes. This lad was Aymon de Kerdec'h, "the little Count," as he was generally called, who had fed at the same breast and had grown up with the Child of the Menhir.

A true little aristocrat was he—slight, dark, delicate-featured, with little imperious ways about him, which showed that easy and sweet tempered as he was, he did not forget that the De Kerdec'hs were wont, as well as the family of Kermavan,* to boast that "*M. le bon Dieu seul est de plus vieille mason.*" His foster parents, however, had no cause to complain of his haughtiness; he never showed it towards them except in the most occasional flashes. They were fond and proud of him as a child of their own, and his easy good-nature, and bright sunny temper made him a great favourite with the other children of the house.

Poor little Mao! No fine strength was his, no bright intelligence. The only brother of the infant under the green churchyard sod, the only other son who had been born to Antonn and Ninorc'h, was a poor innocent—

* The motto of the seigneurs of Kermavan, who are Léonards, is "*Les Kermavan, et Dieu avant.*"

harmless, guileless enough, but still “an innocent,” such as there are but too many by Breton firesides. Alas! poor mother!

Yet she had another child. “God has been good to me,” she was wont to murmur when she looked on her little daughter, “very good to me, for has He not given me Genofa!”

A lovely child was this; a child who, as she passed, drew the eyes of the village after her, with that look which is like a benison, and which was mostly followed by a murmured “God bless her sweet face.” Truly a sweet face; fair among so many dark; daintily fair, though rather with the quiet, delicate beauty of the lily of the valley, than the bright piquancy of the wild rose. Yet it was not the beauty of fragility which distinguished Genofa. Dainty white as she was, with just the palest rose tint upon the soft, round cheek, the blue eyes were nevertheless full of health; the long yellow locks were soft and lustrous as the blossoms of the broom; the slight, graceful figure as supple as the slender twigs on which these blossoms swung under the touch of the summer wind. Everything about Genofa was gentle and subdued—her movements, her voice, her very happiness—were set in a softer key than those of most village maidens; and yet only to look in her face was to gain an impression of the most tranquil content. She was a dreamy, impressionable little being in her peculiar way; sensitive beyond common

to the touch of that mysterious world which we will call nature. The wind had a voice for her, the sunshine a smile, to which her sensitive feelings would open like a flower; but when the icy storms of winter swept over Carnac, when the darkness of a thunderstorm brooded over the earth, she would shiver and grow pale, as if at the touch of an evil thing. No Breton child believed more firmly in the spirits and goblins with which popular superstition peoples the Druid circles, the graveyards, hills, and waters, than did Genoë. None drank in more eagerly or learnt more readily the legends, tales, and ballads of the province, of which old Mère Guenedon was a living repository, than she. Dom Clément might reason with her as he liked, nothing would hinder her from having her own ideas about the spirit world, from feeling an awed kindness towards the benevolent *teuz*,* and dreading the spiteful korigans and the treacherous *groac'h*, and *mary-morgan*. And yet Dom Clément himself acknowledged that a more devout child, as regarded her religious feelings, was not to be found among all his pupils, except perhaps Bernèz Guenedon, her cousin, who was being educated for the Church; but then he was almost a second Saint Timothy, or rather Saint Corneille, which is almost more, so far as the people of Carnac are concerned. How proud was the good father of this lad—his best pupil, who outstripped even himself in zeal for the Church! Never had

* Breton elves of (1) the fields (2) the *laudes* (3) the waters.

a more satisfactory kloärek been sent to the seminary from their village before. "Surely," thought all the inhabitants, "he will bring a blessing on his native place; for is he not the best thing in Carnac? and have we not lent him to the Lord?"

But Bernèz Guenedon, young saint though he undoubtedly was, could not be counted as belonging to Antonn Comorre's quiver, and therefore his introduction must wait.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHEPHERDS' HOLIDAY.

“ Shepherds ! tell me, tell me have you seen
My Flora pass this way ?”—*Old Song.*

GOLDEN sunshine—the rich, mellow sunshine of autumn—flooded the plain of Carnac. The solemn lines of menhirs and peulvens* had lost half their mystic solemnity under the glad light of day, and looked pale, bare likenesses of their awful selves ; like ghosts which have been surprised by the crowing of the cock before they could reach their shelter and vanish decently. Like these, they had lost all their terrors with the darkness, and seemed rather to shrink from the light, than did the things of light shrink from them. A flock of sheep bleated around their cold grey feet, or lay peacefully chewing the cud where their tall shadows fell. Little blue gentians, purple heather, golden gorse, and sweet wild thyme gemmed the short springy turf which hid—who can tell what awful mysteries ?—bones of slain, grim remains of human slaughter, or gruesome heathen sacrifice ; perhaps even something worse than these—from the eyes of men. Well, let them rest, 'tis best such things are covered. Here

* Peulvens—single stones, similar to menhirs, set up on end.

and there in the lower hollows, a deep pool of water laughed in the low sunshine, and the far sea-line twinkled like a girdle of sapphires, set between with tiny diamonds. A sky, blue as the gentions, spanned overhead, where tiny fleecy cloudlets wandered peacefully as the flocks below ; distant lines of menhirs rose tall and grey against the blue haze of the far horizon ; the drowsy hum of insects filled the still warm air, and children's merry voices rippled in between.

A perfect autumn day, indeed. The little herdsmen could not have had a better one for their yearly holiday ; for this was the Shepherds' Holiday, the annual *fête* of the children who have tended the flocks during the spring and summer ; a sort of juvenile Saint Valentine's Day, when each little shepherd chooses his tiny shepherdess for the coming year.

It was, indeed, a pretty sight to see troops of little boys and girls, few older than twelve, for at that age the little shepherds are trusted with the goad, and promoted from the passive watching of the flocks and herds to the active and more manly employment of driving oxen ; and the little shepherdesses have to go home and spin, and bake, and make themselves more actively useful. Many of the parents had come to take a day's holiday in the sunshine with their little ones, and good store of Brittany cheese, cakes, and fruit, had been eaten among the broom, the heather, and the little blue gentions, while old Grandpère Guenedon's quavering voice intoned the *Kentel ar Vugale*,

or children's lesson, whose versified precepts the little herdsmen heard year by year, with, I am afraid, about as much attention as they paid to the sough of the soft wind among the bent and the broom bushes.

Now, however, the lesson was over, old Perik Guenedon had found a mossy stone against which to rest his bowed back and snow-white head, and was dreaming—of what? Perhaps of the Shepherds' Holiday seventy years ago, when he chose Barbäik Rion, the old wife, who now sat by him with her hand in his, to be his little shepherdess. Seventy years ago! And since then how often had they kept the Shepherds' Holiday with their children and children's children, and watched them dance, as the young ones were doing now, around that tall menhir! There was their daughter, Ninorc'h Comorre, knitting placidly, gossiping mildly with the mothers of the village; old Perik remembered when she was the belle among the little shepherdesses, and had been chosen by—who was it? Not his son-in-law Antonn? No, these juvenile pairings did not always foreshadow the real ones; no, no. Who was it? Ah, yes, 'twas the little Count of Coëtmor, he who died ten years later, leaving the De Kerdec'h's sole heirs of the old castle and lands.

And, *à propos*, was not Ninorc'h's little daughter Genofa dancing hand in hand with the Child of the Menhir and the little Count of to-day—he was now heir of Coëtmor? "Well, well, they're but children now, so no harm's done,"

murmured old Perik, sleepily. Then he wondered, still more sleepily, what had become of his own especial home grandchildren, his son's children, Bernèz and Yvonne. Bernèz, to be sure, was almost a young man, and a kloärek to boot; *he* would be above dancing with the little herdsmen. "But Yvonne, the sweetest maid in Carnac, to my thinking, though most folks won't look at her when Genofa's by. Where is Yvonne?"

Here, however, old Perik's drowsiness overcame his curiosity, and he fell fast asleep.

And where was Yvonne?

Apart from the gay throng of merry children, in the very centre of the sacred stones, with her shoulder half resting against one of the side supports of a dolman smaller than most of its fellows, sat a tall girl of about thirteen. She wore the holiday costume of her parish, a facsimile in miniature of her mother's dress. The picturesque white cap just showed the glossy line of dark brown hair which crowned the smooth open brow, and set off the warm tints of the olive complexion and dark kindly eyes. The well-formed, somewhat massive chin, was propped with a hand which had evidently known work already, and the red lips—they were rather wide it must be confessed—were just apart, so as to show the strong, white teeth within. The snowy chemisette and black velvet bodice with its rows of holiday embroidery, fitted tight to a figure which promised to be that of a nobly-formed woman some day

But old Perik was right—Yvonne Guenedon was wont to be overlooked, somehow, when her cousin Genofa was by.

Not, however, by her brother Bernèz ; those two were well-nigh inseparable whenever the young twenty-year-old kloärek was at home from his college at Saint Brienc. He would fain have had her follow in his footsteps so far as was possible for a girl to do, and look forward to the grey habit of the Sœurs de la Sagesse, or the white one of Les Sœurs Blanches. But, with aged grandparents at home, Yvonne could scarcely be spared, even if she were certain of having "*a vocation*," and on this point the girl, though she would not breathe it to Bernèz, knowing his strong ideas on the subject, was more than doubtful. Indeed, she often felt inclined to thank the saints that she had no choice in the matter ; for had not Bernèz said more than once that in his opinion all who were truly spiritually-minded *must* have "*a vocation*," and that a want of it showed that the world was put first and heaven second. Yvonne could not have borne that this adored brother should say that of her, and yet no child enjoyed a *Pardon* more than she did ; none took greater pride in her household work ; and oh ! was it so *very* wrong to love the dear, beautiful world, especially on such a day as this ?

Thus sat Yvonne Guenedon, half meditating on these things, half looking up at and listening to her brother, as, with eyes fixed on the sinking sun and hands clasped round

his knees, he sat on the table-stone of the old heathen world and repeated the “Canticle of Paradise.”

He was a lad to be remarked even among a set so remarkable as the kloäreks of Brittany. A peasant that was, a priest that is to be, the kloärek is, as it were, a being above all others in process of transformation. Taken from the plough at an age when boyhood is not yet over, he exchanges the active life of the farm, the song of birds, the free fresh air which blows over his native fields, for the close study, the confined atmosphere of the university ; where, the home-purse being probably but a scanty one, he has to buy learning, as it were, with the price of bread. From a rough, healthy boy, whose body has outgrown his mind, the kloärek becomes a tall thin lad, whose black, semi-priestly habit (when such a dress can be afforded) enhances the pallor of his thoughtful face and studious brow, round which the hair has already been cut short by anticipation, though the long locks behind show that the priestly vows are yet unspoken. Mind has distanced body.

At home he is no longer treated with the old rough cordiality as one of the family ; old friends and neighbours show him grave respect—the light word, the jest is hushed in his presence. He is an offering, set apart, dedicated to God.

Many a kloärek has turned back to his old life, appalled at the change—at the hard struggle for learning ; at the harder one to keep life in on the pittance that remains after fees have been paid and books bought ; at that,

hardest of all, with the natural affections. Many have thus put their hand to the plough and have turned back.

Bernèz Guenedon never would. So he said himself; so said all who knew him. The home-purse was but small; the lad's way had been a hard and thorny one; but hitherto he had never felt one doubt, one regret. The stern dark face, with its deep eyes full of subdued fire, was ever set towards the heavenly Jerusalem; the resolute mouth, which, grave as it was, could still, in such moments as this, wear the soft expression of melting tenderness, had never uttered a word of self-pity for the hard and lonely path which the feet had chosen.

The following extracts from the Breton poem of "The Canticle of Paradise," which Bernèz was reciting, are a rough translation into English from the French version, given by M. Emile Souvestre, in his "*Derniers Bretons*":—

“‘When I look at Heaven’”—so those lips were murmuring, now,—“‘I say to myself: There is my country! and fain would I fly there like a white dove!

“‘But, alas! I shall still remain here till the hour of death, a prisoner under the flesh which is so heavy to my soul!

“‘When comes the hour of death,—oh! what joy!

Then shall I see Jesus, my true spouse.

“‘And as soon as my chains are broken, I will rise into the air like a lark.

“‘I will pass near the moon to go and rest in the glory of Heaven, I shall be upheld by the sun and the stars.’”

There was an intense fervour in the lad's voice, as he repeated, in musical cadence, the Breton words ; and his face shone in the sunset glory, as though, beyond the fair colours of the west, his eyes could behold the celestial vision. A moment he paused, the rapt look still in his eyes, and clear on the evening air came the children's voices singing the shepherds' call :—

“ *Disul vintin hapa zaviz evit kas ma zaout er mez,
Eklevigvadouz O kana, hag he anaiz dioch he moez;* ”*

“ ‘ And I will sing with joy in my tomb :—My chain is broken—now freedom, freedom for eternity ! ’ ”

murmured the kloärek, as though the sound of singing had touched him with its associations. Again came the children's ringing voices, louder than before :—

“ ‘ There I heard my sweetheart singing, singing on the mountain side,
And I made a song to sing to her across the valley wide.’ ”

“ ‘ I shall be received in the palace of the Trinity, in the midst of honours and delicious songs, and Jesus will place on my head a crown of light.

“ ‘ And He will sing : Bodies which have been blest as yours has been, are a treasure hidden in holy ground.

“ ‘ You are in My court as the roots of white rose-trees, of lilies and of hawthorns in the corner of a garden ; the rose-trees and the hawthorns and the lilies shed their blossom in its season, and again bud forth.

* “As I rose on Sunday morning to drive the kine to lea,
There I heard my sweetheart singing, by the voice I knew 'twas she.”
—Rhymed Translation from Tom Taylor's “*Songs and Legends of Brittany*.

“ ‘ For a few sufferings, for a short disquietude, what a price, my God, shall I receive.’ ”

Again the kloärek paused, and the children took up the strain :—

“ ‘ Like golden blossoms of the broom, or wild rose sweet and small,
Like wild rose in a heath-brake, shone my fair above them all !
All the time the Mass was serving I had only eyes for her,
And the more I gazed upon her, the more love my heart did stir.’ ”

They broke off with a laugh, and merry cries of “ Not yet ! not yet ! The shepherdesses are not yet chosen. Hey, then, Christophe, Jan, Pierrot, who is *thy* wild rose ? And thine, lad ? And thine ? ”

But Bernèz murmured as one who heard not :—

“ ‘ Oh ! how fair will be my part ! I dream of it, I love it beforehand,
Oh ! my heart ! This thought consoles thee in all thy afflictions.’ ”

And thus, in that strange interchange of response between the singers of an earthly love and of a heavenly rapture, the praises of Paradise closed the strain.

Yvonne’s eyes filled with tears ; a strange disquietude awoke in her heart. The rapt face above her, the thin hands folded as if in prayer, seemed all unconscious of her presence. She had left them all for Bernèz, and her brother seemed so far, so very far removed from her.

She heard the voices of her companions coming from all parts of the plain as they dispersed to play their parts in the Shepherds’ Idyll. Now the boys were calling the maidens, each little herdsman naming the shepherdess whom he desired to choose :—

“ *Ali, kë ! ali, kë ! ali, kë !* ”

(A warning, come!) She heard the voices sounding clear and sweet on the evening air; then, when attention was supposed to have been sufficiently gained, came the special call, with the addition of the favoured name:—

“Genofa! *Lè!*” (hear).

“Nonnina! *Lè!*”

“Margaridd! *Lè!*”

“Genofa! *Lè!*”

“Rozenne! *Lè!*”

“Genofa! *Lè!*”

Yes, Genofa’s name came the oftenest.

Then there was a pause. The boys were waiting for their answer. Laughter, sweet treble laughter, rippled a little, and then the maidens responded as pleased them.

“*Néann-ked-dè!*” (I won’t come!) or

“*Mé ia! iè!*” (I come; yes).

Then there was more laughter, and the little shepherds called again to their coy shepherdesses, or ran to meet those who were kind. And——

“Nonina! *Lè!*”

“Genofa! *Lè!*” rang again through the air.

But it was never “Yvonne! *Lè!*”

Had they forgotten her? Did no one want her?

A little sad, disappointed feeling came into the girl’s heart, the tears rose to her eyes. She had given them all up to sit with Bernèz, and even Bernèz did not want her! Nobody wanted her, and everybody seemed to want

Genofa. Yes, there was her name again from another part of the plain.

“Genofa ! *Lè ! Lè ! Lè ! Genofa !*”—

A tear dropped, she could not help it, though the dark eyelashes winked hard to keep it in. And yet there was no jealousy in the child’s heart ; it was much too sweet a little heart for that, sweet and sound to the core, as the best Normandy pippin in her father’s garden. No, it was not jealousy, only disappointment ; for might not *someone* have called her—just one—for, after all *everybody* could not have Genofa.

Hark ! surely that was her name. Yes, there it was at last !

“Yvonne ! *Lè ! Lè ! Yvonne !*”

A flush of pleasure mounted to the child’s face ; her heart beat. She put her finger to her lips as if to enforce silence, and listened breathlessly.

“Yvonne ! Yvonne ! *Lè !*”

“*Mé ia, Christophe, iè !*”

She sprang up, a radiant smile on her parted lips ; went forward a step or two, so as to escape the tall menhir which barred her view, and shaded her eyes with her hand. But soon the smile vanished, a look of disappointment and disgust took its place, and the child returned hastily to her hiding-place beside the dolman.

What had she seen ? Alas ! not her favourite playfellow, Christophe, but Honarn, the son of Perr Kabik, the hump-

backed tailor, who, if not exactly humpbacked himself, inclined that way, and was much looked down upon by the other village children for his simple, awkward ways.

“Honarn,” muttered Yvonne, with disappointed contempt. “Ah, yes, *he* for example! I suppose he wants me because he can’t get anyone else. Well, he may look for me long enough—that one!”

“Yvonne! little one; what, here still? Thou shouldst not have stayed away from the sport because of me, little sister. Ah! Yvonne, no fear that I should be lonely. I have had companions thou knowest not of. Yes, yes! it was a vision of glory that comes not often. Ah! child, couldst thou but have seen it, how hollow would have seemed to thee all earthly joy. But come, ‘tis late; we must be going homewards. No, not to-night, little one,” as Yvonne slipped her arm in his, as if to walk with him “I would fain be alone, and there are the old grandparents, and thy shepherd, sister—where is he?”

But though Bernèz put the question, he did not wait for an answer.

Again the tears rose, as Yvonne stood watching her brother’s figure grow gradually smaller on the sunny heath. Did *no* one want her? Ah, yes, the old grandfather, *he* would want an arm home. Yvonne turned and left the Druid lines, humming softly to herself a verse of the shepherd’s song which the children were singing on their homeward way.

“ Grandfather ! ”

She bent over the old man, who had fallen asleep, and kissed his withered cheek.

“ Grandfather ! come home.”

“ What ! Yvonne, little one ? Where is thy little shepherd, child ? ”

“ Why, *here* he is, grandfather, if thou wilt have me for a shepherdess ! ”

She put her hand through his arm, and laid her soft cheek tenderly against it.

“ Wilt have me, grandfather ? ”

“ Have thee, my sweet ? Ay, what else ? But what were all the lads thinking of, to leave thee, Yvonne ? God bless the child, there's none like her—no, not one.”

And so the pair went home together.

CHAPTER V.

TWO LITTLE SHEPHERDS AND A SHEPHERDESS.

“ She was twelve years old—my darling,
And I was twelve likewise !”

—*Breton Ballad.*

AND Genofa? Why, *that* little maid went home with a shepherd on each side of her, and two voices to sing her praises as she went. Very demurely the pretty child stepped over the heath, refusing to favour either her cavaliers above the other. Each had cried “ *Lè, Genofa!* ” and to both had she answered, (“ *Néann-ked-dè,* ” and then went on humming softly to herself as she picked the blue gentians for the Virgin’s shrine at home. Presently, however, the two shepherds had sought her out ; and the big, solemn Christophe, and the handsome, fiery little Count, had well-nigh quarrelled as to who should have her as his shepherdess.

“ Choose me, Genofa,” said little Aymon, “ Father gives me a louis every month, and I’ll buy thee—oh ! lots of things !”

“ Take me, Genofa,” said the Child of the Menhir ; “ M. le Comte is not here always, and I am. No one shall tease thee about the crooked horns of thy old black cow

when I'm by, Genofa ; and thou shalt have the best
pasturage for thy sheep, and——

“ Yes, yes, Christophe, I know. See, I'll take you both ;
that'll be best.”

“ No, no, Genofa, I want thee all to myself ; I don't
want just half a shepherdess.”

The little spice of coquetry which lurked under Genofa's
quiet ways broke forth at this. An arch smile curled her
cherry lips. She curtsied lowly.

“ Half a shepherdess ! So that's what I am ! Thank
you kindly, M. le Comte. Come, Christophe, is half a
shepherdess enough for thee ? ”

The dark, grave boy came forward eagerly, but Aymon
was not to be baulked.

“ Fie, then, Genofa ! But never mind, little friend !
Half such a shepherdess is better than the whole of any
other in the village ; so I'll e'en take my share.”

Then the two lads wove a golden broom-crown for the
little maiden's yellow hair, and carried her off between
them, as a prize, envied by all. And the two boys sang
in alternate lines the *Ann Alikè*, the time-honoured song
which generations of little Breton herdsmen have sung on
like occasions ; only, whenever the verse would allow of it,
they substituted the name of Genofa for the Mac'haidic of
the original composer :—

“ ‘ As I rose on Sunday morning to drive the kine to lea,
I heard my sweetheart singing—by the voice I knew 'twas she ;
I heard my sweetheart singing, singing gay on the hill-side,
And I made a song to sing with her, across the valley wide.

“ ‘ The first time I set eyes on Genofa, my sweet May,
 ‘ Twas at her first Communion upon an Easter Day,
 In the parish church at Foesnant, ‘ mong her mates in age and size ;
 She was twelve years old, my darling—and I was twelve likewise.’ ”

“ Ah, no ! you’re both out there ! ” laughed Genofa, softly ; “ for I’m only ten, and I haven’t made my First Communion yet ! ”

But the boys put their hands over her mouth, and went on :—

“ ‘ Like golden blossoms of the broom, or wild rose sweet and small,
 Like wild-rose in a heath-brake, shone my fair among them all ;
 All the time the Mass was serving I had only eyes for her,
 And the more I gazed upon her, the more love my heart did stir.

“ I’ve a full-fruited apple-tree in my mother’s orchard-ground,
 It has green turf about it, and an arbour built around ;
 When my sweet May, my best belov’d, deigns to come and visit me,
 We will sit, I and my sweet, in the shadow of that tree.

“ ‘ I’ll pull for her the apple that has the rosiest skin,
 Tie her a posy, with my flower, a marigold, therein—
 A marigold all withered, as for-pined my cheek you see,
 For not one tender kiss of love have I yet had from thee.’ ”

Genofa immediately struck in with the maiden’s part, singing the words which had evidently been originally intended for an older shepherdess than she was, with a frank simplicity, free from any shyness about their meaning. Like the song of a little linnet in the hedge-row, her childish treble sounded on the quiet evening air, while the three pairs of feet tramped to the time of the tune :—

“ ‘ Now hold thy peace, my sweetheart, and soon ; and sing no mo’ ;
 Folk will hear you through the valley, as their way to Mass they go.
 Another time, when on the heath we meet, and there’s none to see,
 One little tender love-kiss I will give you—or two, maybe.’ ”

And to think this is the last pleasant holiday I shall have to spend here for ever so long—ever so long ! ” sighed the little Count.

“ To think that I shall have to go home to-morrow, and then to that horrid school ! Ah, bah ! Christophe, I wish I were like you ; I wish I had no home but Carnac Heath ! ”

The Child of the Menhir winced, and his dark face darkened. Aymon de Kerdec’h’s innocent speech had in it an unintentional sting to which the foundling was very sensitive. No home ! no name ! To a Breton, with all the clinging veneration for birthplace and father’s house, which is so strong in the race, the want was very bitter ; and though, through the kindness of his foster-parents, the boy had had little cause to feel it, the sore was still there, and a chance word would make it smart.

“ Whatever will you do without me, Genofa ? ” continued Aymon, sentimentally, as they entered the hollow lane which led into the village, where the sunset light fell through the reddening leaves overhead and chequered the path at their feet.

“ Now *do* say that thou wilt miss me a little—*thou* at least ? ”

“ There’ll be Christophe still,” answered Genofa, demurely, smiling on her other cavalier.

“ He’ll be there to help me with the cows and sheep, and he can keep them together better than you, Monsieur.”

“ ‘ *You*,’ Gerofa ! ” returned the boy, half pettishly.

“ Since when have I become ‘ *you* ? ’ That’s no pronoun for me, little foster-sister ! ”

“ Yes, but it is, Monsieur Aymon. Mother says that we’re growing up ”—(the little maiden drew herself up as she spoke). Yes, growing up, and we’re to remember that you’ll be a grand gentleman some day.”

“ Yes, Genofa, dear, and then —

But a butterfly flew in between, and the little shepherdess started in pursuit. Butterflies were more to her still than shepherd cavaliers, even though one was the direct heir of the old house of De Kerdec’h.

And so the boys and girls came trooping in, two and two or the most part, from their holiday on the heath, talking, laughing, and singing the *Ann Alikè*, gay and careless as the birds.

Old Perik Guenedon and his little granddaughter came last, as happy a pair, now that the little disappointment was over, as any of them ; he talking of Shepherds’ Holidays long ago ; she listening, and laughing at jests long since spoken—sports long since played.

As they passed the old hawthorn tree, which stood, red-fruited, before the tailor’s door, Yvonne turned her head ; and there, leaning against the gnarled trunk, was Honarn, the tailor’s son, all alone and sad. Their eyes met, and there were tears in his.

Poor boy, and so nobody had wanted him either, not even an old grandfather !

CHAPTER VI.

F O S T E R - B R O T H E R S .

The wren always loves the thatched roof where he was reared, and the voice of his brothers.”—*Breton Proverb.*

“ AND thou wilt not forget me, Christophe, dear brother ?
Thou wilt not forget me when I’m away grinding over the
books ; no, not if they keep me away from Carnac as long
as they say they will this time ? ”

The foster-brothers were going down the hollow lane together to meet the diligence, their arms round each other’s necks, their feet marching together.

“ Forget you, Monsieur Aymon ? No, no ; that’ll never be ”—the boy’s voice shook with earnestness—“ I’ll never forget you, never ! But oh ! Monsieur Aymon, it’ll be *you* that’ll find it hard to remember ! Perhaps when we meet again you’ll be a great gentleman, and you’ll not care to remember us—me, a simple peasant ! ”

The small hand of the little aristocrat pressed the broad shoulder of the son of the soil, on which it rested ; a soft dewy look came into the bright, dark eyes, and there was almost a caress in the voice which answered, in the old words of the Breton proverb :—

“ ‘*Ar laoueanik a gar atao ar touën pe leach e voüe ganet ag ar monez eus breudeur*’* and what brother have I dearer than thee, Christophe?”

“ The good God bless you, Monsieur Aymon, for that!” answered the young peasant, fervently; “ the good God reward you for saying that to one who has no brothers!”

“ I *did* think they would have let us make our First Communion together,” continued the little Count, “ but we’ll remember each other on the day, Christophe—won’t we?”

“ And—and when I grow up I mean often to live at Château Coëtmor; and I’ll make everybody in the village happy; and I’ll do anything for you that you want, Christophe, and——”

But in the midst of all the eager promises, the diligence arrived, and in it the grave, ceremonious man-servant sent by M. le Comte de Kerdec’h to escort his son, who looked on with raised eyebrows as he saw his young master embrace the peasant boy; and, when the horses were again on their way, read the young aristocrat a most respectful lecture on the breach of *les convenances* of which he had been guilty.

But Christophe did not hear it. With his wide beaver doffed, and the wind fanning his dark brow, he stood watching the diligence till it was out of sight, and then——

* “ The wren always loves the thatched roof where he was reared, and the voice of his brothers.”

“ ‘What brother have I dearer than thee, Christophe?’ ” he murmured, dwelling on the words in that loving way which shows how deep they have sunk. “Ay, may the good God bless him for that! There’s nothing that I wouldn’t do for him after to-day, so help me God !”

The last words were spoken with solemn reverence, almost like the taking of a vow; then the boy drew his hand across his eyes, as though to brush away the film of emotion which had risen to dim them.

Little Count Aymon de Kerdec’h, as he sat in the diligence and listened carelessly to the serious exhortation of the grave domestic, little knew the fervour of devotion which those few gracious words, so easily spoken, had kindled for him in the heart of the foundling.

CHAPTER VII.

KEEPING HIS EASTER.

“ Decked like an altar before them there stood the green earth, and above it Heaven opened itself, as of old, before Stephen ; they saw there, Radiant in glory, the Father, and on His right hand the Redeemer. Under them hear they the clang of harpstrings, and angels from gold clouds Beckon to them like brothers, and fan with their pinions of purple.”

—Longfellow.

THE day of the First Communion, which ought to be a milestone in every individual life, is most especially so considered by the young Breton. Ask a boy or girl their age in that most devout of provinces, whose inhabitants speak of each other, not as people, but as *Christians*, and they will reckon, not by birthdays, but by the number of Easter Communions which they have celebrated. It is not “I am fifteen or sixteen,” but “*J'ai fait trois Pâques*,” or whatever number the years since the Confirmation Day may have allowed of. For those who know Brittany, it is almost needless to add, that a Breton who does not yearly make his *Pâques* is considered too much of a black sheep well-nigh, to need reckoning at all.

It was the evening of Easter Day. Vespers were over, and the greater part of the village had turned out in holiday costume to rove the lanes where the first green

leaves were all a-flutter overhead, and pluck the pale primroses, or to smell the breeze, sweet with the golden blossoms of the gorse, as it swept over the great wild heaths which lie round Carnac hamlet.

One figure only lingered by the Church door, which at Carnac is in the centre of the village, apart from the sunny sheltered corner reserved for the grave-yard. This solitary figure, sitting, half-hidden, on the stone bench within the great door-way was Christophe, the Child of the Menhir. To him it was as the first day of the first year; for the first time in his young life he had knelt before the altar, with friends, neighbours, and adopted kinsfolk; and the boy, who had never known the ties of blood on earth, had, through those sacred mysteries, been received into the closest fellowship with the great family in heaven and earth, who are all called after one Great Name.

He knew it by the grave kiss with which his foster-parents turned to greet him, as they crossed the home-threshold together; by the hand which each raised to bless him. He was now their son, not only by fostering care and by Baptism, where Antonn and Ninorc'h Comorre had stood for him at the Font, but by another spiritual tie which lies very close to the deep Breton heart—they had made their *Pâques* together. Henceforth all in Carnac received the foundling as, in a manner, their kinsman.

The heart of the boy was very full; his soul was too overflowing with the thoughts and feelings which had been

summoned there by the sacred act of the morning, to join his companions in their merry holiday-making ; the first impressions were too deep, too fresh for him to bear that the little waves of laughter and light-hearted talk should sweep over them, and thus perhaps efface them from his soul.

Beautiful beyond the things of earth are those first pure aspirations of early dedication—the first-fruits of the soul offered to its Creator.

But, alas ! the Holy Sign is oftener traced in the soft, yielding sand, where the lightest ripple will wash it out, than cut in the enduring rock, from which, though the beat of many a stormy tide may rob it of its first sharp outline, yet has no created wave the power to efface it.

Well, let us, at least, on the day of its tracing, guard it even from the innocent ripple of the world. Too soon must the tide be faced ; let us not go to meet it

Thus Christophe sat in the shadow of the village church, and mused of high things to be done in the strength of that morning's meat.

So rapt was the boy in heavenly aspirations that he did not notice how a shadow fell across the ray of sunlight which lay outside the great church door, and started violently as a hand was laid upon his shoulder ; and looking up he saw the grave face of Bernèz Guenedon before him—the tall, thin figure, in black, semi-priestly garments, standing in the doorway, between him and the evening sky.

“Bernèz !”

“Yes,” returned the kloärek, in answer to his exclamation of surprise,—

“We have some days vacation at the college. I could not get away till yesterday. I walked over from Auray, and have just been to our house, but not finding anyone in except the old grandparents, who were asleep on each side of the fire, I thought to pass the time in church.”

Saying this, Bernèz dipt his finger in the holy-water basin, signed himself, knelt for a moment in prayer, and then returning, sat down by Christophe on the old stone bench.

“Lad,” he said, softly, “why art not with the rest?”

Christophe hesitated a moment, then answered, simply, “I made my First Communion only this morning.”

“It is well,” returned the kloärek, in the same hushed voice. After a pause he added, quoting from “The Canticle of Paradise,” with merely a change of tense :

“‘The gate of Paradise has been opened for me to enter ; the holy men and women have come to take my hand !

“‘I have been received into the palace of the Trinity in the midst of honours and of songs exceeding sweet, and Jesus has placed on my head a crown of light !’ Is it not so, my Christophe ? Ah, yes ! I know it, I know it ! Have not I, too, known a First Communion day ?”

The look of spiritual exultation which always transformed the stern, dark face of the kloärek whenever it came there, burnt in his eyes as he spoke. Christophe’s shy reserve

melted before it. His heart, already full of soft emotions, rose to meet the comprehending sympathy. He laid his strong brown hand on the thin fingers of the kloärek.

“Oh, Bernèz,” he said, in a whisper, “it is just like that. But—it does not seem enough. Is it not all receiving—no giving? One wants—” He stopped. The peasant felt unable to express a meaning too deep for the common words of his every-day life. But the kloärek understood.

“‘What shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath done unto me?’” he said, in that thrilling tone which his mobile voice could assume at will.

“Yes.”

“Thou would’st offer something in return?”

“Oh, yes! If there were anything—” he paused in strong emotion.

“‘Here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto Thee,’” returned the kloärek, in the same thrilling tone, quoting from the Holy Office.

“Christophe, lad, that is what I have done; I have laid down everything at His feet, and—I am happy!”

His eyes shone as he added the last words in a dreamy tone, as if to himself.

“Christophe, lad,” he continued, presently, and his dark keen eyes were fixed so searchingly on the boy’s face that an uneasy feeling awoke in the breast of the latter; “Christophe, lad, art ready to do *that*—to offer thyself, soul

and body, as a whole burnt offering? Lad, can it be that in thee I find a brother?"

The feeling of uneasiness grew in the lad's heart.

"What?" he faltered.

The kloärek bent still nearer, as though he would read the very soul of his young companion.

"Be a priest!"

Christophe started. So intense was the tone which Bernèz had thrown in these three words, that in the stillness they seemed to pierce the listener like a dart.

"A priest! I was not thinking of that. I meant—Bernèz, how could I be? I have no vocation."

The boy was greatly startled, greatly troubled; but the kloärek did not heed it. He rose.

"He that loveth aught earthly more than Christ, is not worthy to be His disciple," he said, coldly. "No vocation! Yes, that is what they all say, and yet"—(his tone warmed), "Lad, I should have thought that if anyone were marked out for the holy calling, it would have been thou! Without father, without mother, without earthly ties whatsoever; no one to claim thy service but God and the brethren. Even in a worldly point of view, it would give thee a position—a standing. But, no; it is unworthy to speak of that. Lad, lad, think; art *sure* the good God has not called thee?" He stood before Christophe, and again fixed on him the searching look which sent a superstitious tremor through the lad's whole being.

“Had God called him? Could it be that it was indeed his duty? The lad’s heart, taken by surprise, and greatly troubled, began to question itself.

Bernèz, in his black cassock, stood there waiting. All was very still, so still that Christophe seemed to hear the sound of question and answer within him. But it was all sound, all confusion. Bernèz had come to trouble his pure and happy dream ; the heavenly images were broken, as in water ruffled by a storm. Suddenly a distant sound of laughter rippled the quiet evening air. Merry voices spoke ; then, clear above the rest, rose a girl’s fresh voice, singing snatches from the *sône* of the “Poor Clerk” :—

“Oh ! to what shall I liken her, that a wrong it shall not be ?
 To the pretty little white rose, that is called Rose-Marie ?
 The pearl of girls ; the lily when among the flowers it grows,
 The lily newly opened, among flowers about to close.”

The voice broke off—there was more laughing. Then another voice took up the song at another place. It was a man’s voice this time :—

“Ah, me ! my stars are froward ; 'gainst nature is my state ;
 Since in this world I came I've dreed a dark and dismal fate :
 I have no living kin nor friends, mother or father dear ;
 There is no Christian on earth to wish me happy here !”

Christophe started. Strange, were not these almost the words of Bernèz ?

But before he could think of it Genofa danced up the village street, crowned with primroses, with her little apron

full to overflowing of the same sweet blossoms, leading the band of holiday makers. How fair she looked with the last sunbeams touching her golden hair, and her sweet child's face radiant with quiet happiness !

“Christophe ! Christophe !” she exclaimed, catching sight of the boy who had risen to his feet, “Why did’st not come ? Where hast thou been all this time ? See, *do* help me to carry all these.”

She held out her sweet yellow burden towards him, and the boy gathered it up.

“*I have no living kin nor friends, mother nor father dear.*”

Yes, that was true enough. But was there not Genofa ? His dear little foster-sister, Genofa ?

And with the sight of Genofa and the primroses, all the puzzling thoughts about vocation fled away.

After all, he was but a boy yet, and there was plenty of time to think.

But Bernèz stole into the empty church and prayed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY OF THE DEAD.

“ Then the forms of the departed
Enter at the open door ;
The beloved, the true-hearted,
Come to visit me once more ! ”

—*Longfellow.*

THE black month* came, the melancholy month in which they celebrate the Festival of the Dead ; when, as the Breton proverb says, “ the leaves are less thick upon the ground than are the souls of the departed in the air.”

It was All Souls’ Day, and Nature, as well as all the inhabitants of Carnac, had clothed herself in mourning for the occasion. The first black frost of the year had nipped the last blossom in the cottage garden, and bound the earth with its iron fetters. The leaden sky lowered heavily, and a dreary, cutting wind whistled in the trees, sending the dead leaves down in showers upon the graves, and moaning as it swept over the stiffened blades of grass which grew there.

All day long the death bell tolled, and the people went softly, with grave sad faces, each one remembering his dead, each one thinking on some dear one who had gone before.

* So the Bretons call November.

Even the very children hushed their voices as they made up their little offerings of flowers for grandmother's grave, or to place on the tiny green hillock, under which lay a baby brother or sister, scarce remembered except in the prayer said morning and evening at mother's knee.

The bell for vespers was ringing slowly and dolefully from the belfry of Carnac Church ; the black-robed people of the village were all in the cemetery, bending over the graves, placing flowers there, and filling with holy-water the little receptacles made for this purpose. Some were down on their knees, praying calmly over bones long since dry ; others were almost prostrate beside a new-made grave, watering the withered sod with bitter tears ; while others again knelt at the *Reliquaire*, where, according to a strange Breton custom, were rows of little wooden niches, each containing a skull, over which could be read the name which it had borne in life.

In one corner, half kneeling, half leaning upon his staff, was old Perik Guenedon, looking, not without satisfaction, at a moss-grown cross inscribed with the names of generations of his family, and at a little wooden box, something like a dog-kennel, and evidently just out of the joiner's hand, in which he had but that morning placed the bones of his first-born son, who had died as a little child full fifty years ago.*

* It is a curious custom at Carnac, and some other places in Brittany, to exhume the bones of relatives when they have been dead about fifty years, and put them, enclosed in little boxes, on the graves of those more recently buried.

“Yes, thanks be to God and the Saints ! all that is left on earth of my poor Bernèz now rests above the bones of his mother!” said old Perik to a friend who stood near.

“It is not many parents who live long enough to do that for their children, and not every one who can spend so much on their dead. Holy Virgin ! how I have had to save to get it done, now food is so dear and taxes so high. But it is worth it to bring them together on the same spot of sacred ground, as I hope we shall all meet in Paradise one day. The Saints grant that some one may do as much for me when *my* time comes, neighbour ! Poor dear old wife, and thou my little son Bernèz, the knowledge of what has been done this day will ease your souls in Purgatory—I know it will !”

So old Perik mauldered on, as he looked with ever-increasing satisfaction at his little wooden box, and compared it with some resting on other graves.

“Little Bernèz has got the finest in all the cemetery I do believe,” was his concluding remark, and the thought seemed to comfort him greatly.

Under a weeping willow, whose last yellow leaves were showered at every blast upon her white-capped head, knelt Ninorc’h, carefully clearing the dead flowers from the tiny green grave of her lost baby. Not till every blade of grass which grew there had been stroked into order by her fingers, and a long ivy-tendril twined round the little wooden cross, did the mother rise, and then it was only to throw

away the weeds. She soon knelt again, and with folded hands prayed long and earnestly. Tender words were whispered by her lips, gentle supplications to the Mother Maid, who, like her, had known what it is to love a child, mingled with soft words addressed to her little angel in Heaven, who had died without spot of sin—all fresh from baptism—that he would pray for little Mao, his brother innocent upon earth, and for all at home. This yearly commemoration was very sweet to Ninorc'h ; it seemed to bring her into such close communion with her baby, that sometimes she was tempted to believe that the wind whispering in the willow leaves was the voice of her little one answering her from Heaven. Nor did anyone notice her. All there seemed to have their special grave, which absorbed all their attention ; some even had many, and scrupulously divided their prayers, that none of the absent might feel themselves neglected. Even Yvonne and Genofa had each their grave ; the former had lost her grandmother in the harvest-time, and her tears, scarcely dried from the first agony of parting, flowed afresh as she knelt ; while Genofa laid her little offering of autumn flowers on the small mound which covered the body of a girl friend who had been very dear to her. Only Christophe had no one there. He had come with his foster-mother and sister to carry their offerings for them, and now stood unnoticed and alone by the gate, leaning on the topmast rail, and watching all the village as it went and came ; the dead for

once, on this one day of the year, occupying all the thoughts and attention of the living.

No one noticed Christophe ; he was alive, and there were no thoughts to spare for him on the Day of the Dead. And yet the boy was more to be pitied than many who wept and prayed by the long green graves.

He had no grave, none belonging to him lay in this holy plot of ground to be tended and cared for. All the village had their ties with the other world ; their kinsfolk and friends lay here in their midst, and could be visited and prayed for at any moment. His were—where? He alone was bound by no ties of kindred to this peaceful spot—the village mourned together ; he was as a soul shut out. Where were they—father, mother, kin? Had he any, or was he only what the village called him—a Child of the Menhir—nameless!—never to be claimed?

Tears gathered in the boy's eyes. What of that?

The wind dried them. No one noticed.

*“I have no living kin nor friends, mother nor father dear!
There is no Christian on earth to wish me happy here!”*

The trees, as they rustled drearily, seemed to whisper the words to him. They seemed made for him.

But was there really no one on earth to “wish him happy?”

He looked at his foster-relations. They were all absorbed in their dead. All were very kind to him. Yes, but he was not of their kin, and perhaps some day—who could tell?—

they might tire of him. There was no tie of blood to bind them to him. He had heard the neighbours say that once, when they did not know he was by. Could it be true?

Such thoughts as these were as the whispers of Christophe's bad angel. They did not often visit him, but there were times, black times, when the air seemed full of them. Such was All Souls' Day. He generally spent it away from home to avoid a sight which called up the memory of his forlorn condition; but his foster-family did not like his absence from the general commemoration, and to-day Genofa had forestalled it by specially asking him to carry her offerings, and there were few things he could refuse Genofa. So he had come, though all the time he would fain have been away.

“Would God that I had a father and mother like the rest!” was the yearning prayer of the boy's heart. “Would God I had, even though they lay in the grave!” The words seemed to say themselves over in his heart all the time of vespers, when the black-robed village people were kneeling in prayer for their dead, in the parish church where these had been wont to kneel in life. The same thought, intense, despairing, haunted him while he walked in procession with the rest round the cemetery to see Dom Clemènçz bless the tombs. It made him silent and moody at the supper, which was eaten in awe-struck solemnity, like the old Jewish Passover, to the doleful sound of the death-bell, swinging heavily in the church hard by, where

the priests were singing their Masses for the Dead. But no one remarked his sadness, for all were sad, or at least seemed so.

After supper, Ninorc'h and Genofa re-arranged the table, placed the bread and meat in order, and left the chairs before each place, that the souls of the departed, set free that night, and permitted to retake forms which they had worn in life, might have wherewithal to regale themselves, if it should please them to revisit their old home.* The fire, too, was made up and replenished, for, said Ninorc'h, half to herself, as she swept the hearth, "They will be a-cold, poor things, this dreary night; they will need to warm their bloodless fingers! Where will *thou* sit, my sweet angel? Ah, me! that I could see thee!" She sighed, and outside there came an echo to her sigh, long-drawn and very dreary. Ninorc'h started, half repenting of her wish.

"Hark! Antonn," she whispered, "what was that?"

"'Twas but the wind," answered her husband. "See, Ninorc'h, it has not yet struck twelve. But, let us hasten; 'tis not good to be out of bed when the midnight bell rings. Who can say what we might see?"

He crossed himself with a shudder, and the whole family, following his example, retired to bed.

The fire crackled and burnt red; the flickering flame, now bringing into relief the sacred monogram, carved in polished oak over the sliding door of each of the box-beds

* A Breton superstition.

which lined the walls, now making it vanish again into gloom. The wind moaned among the withered foliage, and tapped the ivy leaves against the windows. Twelve struck from the kitchen clock, and then was taken up by the deep bell of the parish church. As the last stroke died away, the death knell for the departed began again to toll. Shuddering fell each stroke upon the cold night air, and many a heart shuddered in response. Then there was silence—waiting, expectant silence.

Ninorc'h hushed her breath.

Hark ! there it was—the voice of the *sonneur des âmes*, the Death Watchman of Old Brittany :—

“ Awake, O, sleepers—rise from bed !
Pray unto God—pray for the dead ”

Then the mother's hands joined, and her trembling lips prayed half-audibly for her little dead babe and for the souls of all the family.

Scarcely was her prayer ended—scarcely had the voice of the *Sonneur* died away down the village street—than many voices rose to take its place—voices of old men, weak women, little children—plaintive, quavering, shrilly sad, mingled with moans and sobs and wails of the wind.

First it was all murmur—confusion of sound; then, as the voices became nearer, order seemed to form itself among the chaos of mingling sound; and an air, with words joined to it, came to the listening ear. It was :—

THE SONG OF THE SOULS IN PAIN.*

“ ‘ By Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
We greet this house, its head and host,
Greeting and health to great and small—
And bid you all to praying fall.

“ ‘ When Death knocks, with his hand so thin,
At midnight, asking to come in,
No heart but with a quake doth say,
Who is it Death would take away ?

“ ‘ And you, be not amazed, therefore,
If we the Dead stand at the door ;
'Tis Jesus bids us hither creep
To waken you, if chance you sleep.

“ ‘ To wake you in this house that bide—
To wake you, old and young beside ;
If ruth, alack, live under sky,
For succour in God's name we cry !

“ ‘ Brothers and friends and kinsmen all,
In God's name, hear us when we call ;
In God's name, pray for us—pray sore,
Our children, ah, they pray no more !

“ ‘ They that we fed upon the breast,
Long since to think of us have ceased :
They that we held to our heart's core,
Hold us in loving thought no more !

“ ‘ My son, my daughter, daintily,
On warm soft feather-beds ye lie ;
Whilst I your mother, I your sire,
Scorch in the purgatory fire.

“ ‘ All soft and still and warm ye lie,
The poor souls toss in agony :
Ye draw your breaths in quiet sleep,
Poor souls in pain their watching keep.

* From “ Ballads and Songs of Brittany.”

A white shroud and five planks for bed—
 A sack of straw beneath the head ;
 And over it five feet of clay,
 Are all Earth's goods we take away.

We lie in fire and anguish-sweat,—
 Fire over head, fire under feet :
 Fire all above, fire all below—
 Pray for the souls that writhe in woe !

Aforetime when on earth we moved,
 Parents we had and friends that loved ;
 But now that we are dead and gone,
 Parents and lovers we have none !

Succour, in God's name, you that may :
 Unto the Blessed Virgin pray,
 A drop of her dear milk to shed,
 One drop on poor souls sore bestead !

Up from your beds, and speediliè,
 And throw yourselves on bended knee !
 Save those whose ailments sore make lame,
 Or Death already calls by name !”

It is impossible to render the inexpressible sadness of this lament. Though the family at the farm had heard it year by year—though they knew that the melancholy voices were those of the wandering beggars, who always crowded to the hamlets for the yearly commemoration—yet they could not divest themselves of the shuddering feeling that it was, indeed, the souls of their dead who were pleading for their prayers. Indeed, Breton superstition clings to the belief that the departed *really* come ; that it is *really* they who knock at the doors in this midnight hour, under the form of the homeless and suffering.

“I, your mother—I, your sire”—could it be, could it possibly be, that the soul of a parent stood there without in the cold, asking for prayers? Christophe, like the others, had risen in his bed; a strange, wild belief took possession of his soul; he seemed to *feel* that someone belonging to him might be very near, and with pale, nervous lips he repeated the Prayer for the Dead.

The voices swept on; yet there was a sound as of footsteps on the threshold, then a knock, as from an oaken staff, sounded on the door.

Ninorc'h and Genofa trembled; but Antonn crossed the floor without more than a passing heart-beat. Night of the Dead though it was, he knew that the wandering beggars, taking advantage of the superstition concerning them, would often ask for hospitality in the name of the departed. It might be—nay, he was almost certain it could only be—one of them, and if—(the cold dew broke out on Antonn's brow as the thought struck him)—if it should be a soul—well, then, the good God who had sent it, keep him from harm! Whereupon Antonn reached the door, and, in a tolerably firm voice, challenged the visitor:

“In God's name, who knocks?”

“In God's name, Christian, and for the sake of the dead, let me in, or I perish with cold and hunger!”

“A human voice by the sound, the saints be praised! Well, then, in God's name”—and crossing himself thrice, Antonn opened the door.

“ Matelinn Gourven !”

“ The same, as you see, friend Antonn Comorre,” answered the klaskervara, for he it was.

“ Why, it is years since I set eyes on you ! I heard—” Antonn lowered his voice and stepped back a little as his visitor entered—“ they *did* say in the parishes that—that—”

“ That I was *dead* ! Well, what of that ? Nay, never fear, Antonn ; I’m in the body yet, wretched though it be. Ay, ay, man, folks *will* talk ; but Matelinn Gourven’s not dead yet. Be a good Christian, though, Antonn ; let me have bite and sup, and sleep my sleep out here by the fire before you ask me any more questions. I’m as famished and weary as the souls in pain. There, there, *Pax Vobiscum*, as the priests say. Go rest, and peace be with you all ! Sure, every bite and sup I eat at your table this night will be counted as a day less for your dead in purgatory. There, good night, gentlemen and ladies, and the company. Sleep well, I’ll not forget you in my prayers.”

CHAPTER IX.

“M Y F A T H E R !”

“Now, say, what is thy heart’s desire?
’Tis thine, whate’er thou may’st require.”

“Oh ! Thou that madest Earth and Heaven,
A bitter cup to me is given !”

—*Ballads and Songs of Brittany.*

“AND so, Antonn, that’s the boy — the Child of the Menhir—eh ?” Matelinn chuckled.

“Well, well, I see thou’st done bravely by him, and I thank thee, friend. I shall have reason to be proud of my lad—I see that.”

“*Thy* lad?” Antonn Comorre had felt a movement of indignation at the “*thou*” addressed to him by the beggar ; but there was that in his speech which made him forget the familiarity—nay, use it in return.

“Ay, *my* lad, friend Antonn. What dost think ? Should I have insulted thee by placing him in thy family if he had been a nameless brat—a mere foundling ?”

“Not even this last audacity could draw Antonn from the troubled surprise and bewilderment which had fallen upon him.

“Come, come, Matelinn Gourven, no more of this

jesting! Why, you told me when you brought the child here that he was none of yours ; and when you have seen him since—how long is it ago? No matter, you never claimed him even then!"

The klaskervara chuckled, as at a good joke.

"Well, then, friend Antonn, what of that? How should we get on in the world, we poor soldiers of the ragged regiment, if it were not for our little innocent stratagems? All's fair in love and war, thou knowest, friend Antonn. Come, now, don't accuse me of telling thee lies. I never *said* he wasn't mine. I said I found him, and so I did—a poor little starving thing at the foot of the menhir down by the little Saint-Michel there ; and if I hadn't had pity on him, he'd have died there as his mother did. So, so! that's all the thanks I get! Never scowl at me like that, lad! Come, my son—come and embrace thy father!"

It was the morning after the Day of the Dead.

The cold grey November daylight had come back to the world, chasing the shadows before it ; and the ghostly beings, who had haunted all hearts and minds on the preceding evening, had, all but those most recently lost, retreated again into the background of memory. Forgotten? No ; those whom we have dearly loved in life can never be wholly that ; rather laid aside reverently in the depths of the heart with other sacred dormant memories which will not bear the common light and handling of every day, as we shut up the tokens which they have left

with our greatest treasures, and lay sweet sprigs of lavender in between.

Neglected? Ah! no, ye lost and dead, not that!

Would ye, who love us best, wish to lie so on our memories, so in our thoughts, that the torn void there left when your living presence was uprooted, should fester ever?—that our eyes should weep so with constant looking at your empty places—that they became all too dim for daily wcrk?

That can I never believe. Rather would ye that we should embalm your memory in our inmost thoughts, and hold it there—not to freeze us, not to pain—but to warm, to soften, to encourage; to be remembered, not so much before men as before God.

Rudely did the klaskervara break in upon the folding up of these tender memories. The rough anxieties of life sadly bruised the sacred thoughts of the other world which still lingered in every heart on Antonn's farm. Ninorc'h and Antonn had been gently grieving over the memory of their little dead son in Paradise. Now a living one, adopted in his stead, loved, as the tiny infant had not had time to be, was about to be snatched from them. They sat mute, half-stunned, too much taken by surprise almost to question the truth of what had just been announced to them.

As for the boy, he had stopped suddenly in crossing the room, and stood there, as though paralysed by the words he had heard. White, trembling, aghast he stood, trying to

understand—sickening, as the meaning of the words dawned upon him.

“ My son !” the title struck him like a blow.

Son ! Son to Matelinn Gourven, the beggar, the seeker of bread, the subsister on public charity, to whom the good wives flung their brown crusts and cheese-rinds as they did to the pigs ! Matelinn Gourven, with his beggar’s wallet and long staff, with his filthy clothes and grimy face, with a countenance which spoke of a soul within, more filthy and grimy still ! Matelinn Gourven, at whom the village boys jeered as a sly cheat, who had no need to beg at all were it not for his laziness. Matelinn Gourven, at whom, when, as a little boy, he saw him last, he had himself pointed the finger, and, in allusion to the goat-keeping village of which he was popularly believed to be a native, had screamed with the rest——

“ Porscorff—Bridré
Goats’ flesh, Béé !”

This his father !—*This ! this !*

“ Would to God I had a father and mother !” The wish had been in his mind so strongly all the day before that it had been as a prayer. Was God answering it—and thus ? If this man were his father, what must his mother have been ? The question brought a strong shudder. Matelinn had said she was dead. Well, let her rest, ’twas better so ; enough to have such a father, and alive ! Yes, alive Better the dumb, cold stone after which they named him

than this. Better to have remained the unknown Child of the Menhir all his life.

These thoughts flashed, like scathing lightning, through the boy's mind, in the momentary pause during which he faced the man who claimed him as a son, without further speech on either side.

Matelinn Gourven had said, "Come, my son, embrace thy father!" and then had stopped as though expectant, the leer in his little grey eyes, the sarcastic smile on his thin lips spreading gradually over all his face, he read, while as in an open book, the horror, disgust and repugnance on the countenance of the boy.

"So, so, youngster," he said at last, in that level, acid tone, which, like the thin scum on foul water, hides, while it indicates, something worse beneath. "So, youngster, thou dost not seem so delighted as might have been expected to find thy father! Don't be shy, boy; thou and I will know each other better ere long, and then——by-the-by, what do they call thee? I did not attend the christening, but doubtless our good friends here saw to that. I knew them to be good Christians when I placed thee with them. Eh, friend Antonn?

This last speech was almost too much for the honest Breton farmer. He shook himself from his stupification, and brought his right hand down on his knee with a resolute smack.

"Enough of this, Matelinn Gourven," he said. "You've

had bite and sup, and night's lodging too, and you're welcome to it ; I was never the man to grudge what I gave to God's poor ; but don't begin to pay me back in any of your evil coin. It's time I went a-field, and the good wife wants the kitchen fire. Take thy wallet, and trudge.”

“Ay, ay, friend Antonn, I'm ready whenever the boy is. Come, lad, make thy farewells, and pay thy thanks to these good people.”

“What ! You mean to take him ?”

“Ay !”

“And why, in the name of our holy St. Corneille, if he be thy son, this sudden claiming of him ? Heaven send me patience ! 'Tis all a riddle to me.”

“A riddle easily read then, friend Antonn. Stay, and I'll give thee the word of the enigma. 'Tis a short one—*pillawer*.* Thou knowest what *that* means—eh, my friend ?”

Antonn stamped.

“If I know what it means ? You've come to insult me, then, Matelinn Gourven, for example ? There're no rags here !”

“Ah, ha ! wait a bit ; I'll come back later,” laughed Matelinn, using the customary sarcasm of the dismissed rag-merchant, in reply to Antonn's words.

“But come, Antonn Comorre, don't excite thyself so much ; 'tis bad for the heart, not to mention the soul—least

* A Rag Merchant.

of all the digestion. See, then, this is how it is. My brother, the *pillawer*, is just dead—the Saints rest his soul!—and he's left me his horse and panniers, his donkey, and all his little business. Now, as a simple klaskervara I was better unincumbered, and I was loth to take my boy from you, knowing he was useful; but now it's a little different. I want him to help me with the business, and it's a good prospect for him—a good prospect. *Hein?*"

"A good prospect! Take your good prospects to the Horned Angel,* and begone!"

Antonn shook his fist, and grew crimson with rage.

"See, rascal of a klaskervara, you bring your beggar's brat to me and fool me with a story of holy charity, and then, when he is up and become as mine own, you come and steal him, and pay me with impudence! I'll tell you what, Matelinn Gourven, if—— Heavens! What have I said? Never look at me like that, Christophe, my boy! Thou knowest thou'st been welcome for thine own sake, and I'll stand by thee always; but if he *be* thy father, why then—— Come, Ninorc'h, my wife, don't take on so! Heaven send me patience, for I'm at the end of mine own, and Old William†'s running away with my tongue!"

Poor Antonn wiped his brow and sat down helplessly. Ninorc'h rose, went to the boy, who still stood in the middle of the floor, took his hand, and leaning her head

* One of the Breton names for the Evil One.

† Another Breton appellation for the same.

on his shoulder, broke into sobs, which were echoed by the innocent in the chimney-corner.

Christophe took no notice of any of them. His foster-mother's tears dropped upon his hand—he did not seem to feel them. His foster-father fumed, and uttered little Breton exclamations (which will not bear translating) in a low, growling tone ; the klaskervara sat, calmly munching the remains of his breakfast, waiting for the storm to subside. Christophe stood there and paid no heed. The boy was trembling with suppressed emotion of various kinds. Every word of the foregoing conversation had struck him as so many blows—blows dealt on one who is already half-stunned ; two utterances had been as dagger-thrusts.

The “*my son*” of the klaskervara. “*Your beggar's brat,*” spoken in heat by Antonn Comorre.

“Beggar's brat !” *This*, then, was what they held him—they on whose love he had so long rested ! Now was he an outcast indeed. Oh ! it was hard—hard ! Beggar's brat ! How the name stung him ! Well, if they called him so, let him be so, indeed. He would not stay to shame their honest dwelling ; he would go with this man who claimed him.

Indignant pride braced the heart, torn and bleeding with sorrow and dismay. Gently disengaging himself from his foster-mother, the boy moved forward and stood before Antonn Comorre.

“Good-bye,” he said, in a low, constrained voice—

“Good-bye, and may God reward you for what you have done for—” the word seemed to stick in his throat, but he resolutely brought it out,—“the beggar’s brat !”

Antonn Comorre looked up, and a sob shook his hardy frame.

“No, no, my boy—my *son* (for thou *art* my foster-son, Christophe, whoever else may claim thee) ; do not let us part like this. Perhaps it’s all a tale. Stay, I’ll consult Dom Cleménçz—he’s a wise man ; though if this *be* thy father, why then— lad, lad ! but it’ll go hard to part with thee !”

The Breton respect for the rights of a father over his son, struggled with intense reluctance to let the boy, whom he had come to look on as his son, go—and with such a man ! Antonn Comorre gazed at the boy with a wistful, puzzled expression. The question raised was too knotty for him.

But Christophe cut the knot. He turned to the klas-kervara, whom before he had resolutely ignored. “Tell me, have you spoken truth ?” he asked briefly.

Matelinn looked up from his breakfast and nodded—his mouth was too busy for words.

“Well then, I will go,” continued the boy, again addressing his foster-father, and speaking in the same constrained tone. “It is better so. God bless you all ! Good-bye, mother ; don’t forget me quite, and don’t let Genofa forget me. I’d have liked to say good bye, only she’s out, and—I can’t wait.”

There was a catch of the breath, as at some inward pain ; but the dark face was perfectly calm, and the firmly set lips which kissed the weeping Ninorc'h did not even tremble.

Ninorc'h looked up at their touch—a dumb, pleading look on the white, quivering features, which was beyond all words. So might a mother sheep look after the lamb which is being carried away from her.

It touched Christophe to the quick, and nearly broke down the proud reserve. He put out his hand, then drew it back hastily, and turned again to the klaskervara. “ Let us go,” he said, and without waiting for a reply, left the house.

“ So, so, the young rascal’s in a hurry,” said Matelinn, with a regretful look at the eatables which still remained on the table.

“ I didn’t think he’d have been quite so keen. However, blood’s thicker than water, when all’s said and done, and you have my thanks, good friends, for all you’ve done for him. The saints keep you.” And shouldering his wallet, the ex-klaskervara took his leave, unsped.

Meanwhile Christophe strode down the hollow lane away from the farm-house, looking neither to right nor left ; not daring to think, lest the horror of what had come, and was coming upon him, should rush in upon his soul, and sweep away his resolution before it was fully carried out.

He dared not realize what had happened ; he dared not take his eyes from the ground, lest the sight of the well-

known land-marks—of the little robin piping up there among the withered leaves of the elm-trees—of the old mossy well round the corner—should bring down the tears which throbbed behind his eye-balls. Fain would he have shut his ears to the robin's song, to the bubbling of the water, which sounded louder and louder as he neared the corner of the lane; but he could not. Yet they hurt him. "Stop and think," they seemed to say,—“will you leave us without a look, Christophe?”

“*Christophe!*”

It was neither robin nor water which uttered his name this time, but the tone was just as sweet.

The boy looked up with a start, and there beside the old well, with one brown pitcher full at her feet, and the other filling at the spout, round which the mosses clustered and the red leaves fell, was Genofa.

“*Christophe!* what's the matter? Where are you going?”

He stopped and stared at her without a word.

“*Christophe,*” went on the little maiden, presently, “Don't be cross. Come, I want you to help me home with the pitchers.”

“I can't.”

“Why?—They're so heavy!”

“Genofa—Oh, Genofa!”

“*Christophe,* in the name of Heaven, what's the matter?”

The child was startled at the tone of the voice, at the

look on the pale face of her playfellow. She forgot her pitcher, and let the water fill it and overflow its brown sides.

"I'm going away."

"Where?—‘Why?’"

"Where?—I don't know. Why?—Because my father wants me."

He gulped over the word.

"Father? Never! He wouldn't want thee to go, Christophe, I know he wouldn't. It's a joke—that's what it is, and I don't like such jokes, Christophe."

"A joke. Would to God it were!"

"But I don't understand. *Father* hasn't sent thee away—I'm sure of that."

I wasn't speaking of *thy* father, Genofa, but of *mine*."

"Thine! But, Christophe, thou hast no ——"

She stopped.

"But they say I have."

"Who?—The Menhir? Christophe, dear Christophe! don't look like that!"

Tears sprang to the pretty eyes; the red lips quivered. Christophe could not bear it any longer. He felt his eyes clouding, his lips trembling also, and he *would* not cry—no he would *not*.

"Good-bye, little sister," he said, stooping down to kiss the child's smooth brow, "Don't forget me!"

"But, Christophe, is it true? Has thy father come? Is he some one grand—a viscount, perhaps?—a baron? Oh

Christophe, is he like the father we used to make stories about when we were little,—dost remember? Is he —”

She paused and turned her head to listen. There were sounds round the corner of the lane—the tread of animals, the heavy footfall of a man, the cracking of a switch, and a rough voice scolding, swearing. Christophe turned his head also.

Round the corner came the klaskervara—or rather the pillawer, as he now styled himself—leading by the bridle an old pack-horse, lean, raw-boned, jaded by travel and blows and burdens; and, urged on by stripes from his switch, rough words and oaths, a little brown donkey in front, with a pair of panniers slung across its back. Driver and animals were alike—dirty and ill-kept; the latter added old age and starvation to the evils which they shared in common with their master. Well for them that they did not share the low cunning and cruel look which was the ordinary expression of his face when free from observation.

“*That* is my father, Genofa.”

“*That!* Oh, Christophe !”

“Hush!—Good-bye, little sister!”

He stooped again to kiss her, but started with a shiver, as the pillawer’s rough voice ceased its oaths for a moment to address him.

“So here thou art, boy? I thought thou’st given me the slip. If thou hadst, by—” (here an apostrophe came in, very different to the pious ones which the good wives of

the country were accustomed to hear from the lips of Matelinn Gourven)—“if thou hadst and I’d caught thee again, I’d have made this switch and thy shoulders well acquainted, my son—so I would! Come, look sharp!—take the donkey’s bridle, and trudge.”

Christophe’s dark face grew a shade paler, his eyebrows contracted as with pain; but without a word he took the bridle, and the strange pair went down the lane together.

Genofa watched them till they were out of sight, too much struck with astonishment to move or speak; then, when even the sound of their footsteps had almost died away on the calm autumn air, she threw her little apron over her face and burst out crying.

BOOK II.

The Pillawer.

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR.

BOOK II.—THE PILLAWER.

CHAPTER I.

A R I S T O C R A T I C.

“ on the left.
The well-born, on the right the merest mob,
To treat as equals!—’tis anarchical.”

E. B. BROWNING—*Aurora Leigh*.

THE Château de Kerdec'h stands among the poplars and apple orchards of North Brittany. Trees hedge it in on every side, yet not so thickly as to exclude the warm sunbeams which slide between the leafage in summer time and the brown network of branches in winter, to bask on its strong grey walls and little pointed turrets; for the sun seems to love the gentle southern slope where the Comtes de Kerdec'h have built their home. Little is left of the castle now; it is more than half unroofed, and the black touch of fire may still be seen upon the stones which would not burn. But in 1788 it was still in all its glory. The long avenue of smooth-boled beeches which led up to the

entrance gate was well kept, and free from the grass and weeds which carpet it now ; the stone griffins of Kerdec'h still guarded the great stone pillars of the gate itself, and the flower-garden and tennis-court within, winter though it was, were not untended.

The wintry sun had sunk, round and red, behind the leafless woods and hedgerows ; the windows of the château, which looked west, were just losing its ruddy glow, and the sun-sparkles were dying out of the light snow-powder upon coping and pinnacle, to give place to the moon-sparkles which would soon be lit there by the great white orb, whose silver rim was already appearing over against the sunset. Through the windows of the long withdrawing-room anyone standing outside might have seen a *valet de chambre* moving up and down, touching turn by turn, with a point of fire, the white wax candles which branched from the wall, while another bore in the beechen log which was to serve for the evening's fuel.

Madame la Comtesse was standing beside the window looking down the avenue, with the red glow of the dying west on her pale face and powdered hair, while Mademoiselle Renée de Kerdec'h, her daughter, kneeled before the fire, playing with a small silken-eared spaniel.

“ There they are ! ” exclaimed Madame, presently, waving her hand till the deep lace ruffles fell back and showed her white arm to the elbow. “ See, Renée, how well Aymon looks ! *Ciel*, how he is grown ; thou wilt hardly know him

again—thou ! Say, dearest, how long is it since thou hast seen him ? Thou wast at thy convent last time he was here.”

“ Ah ! *Maman*, I know not,” returned the young lady, forsaking Finet to join her mother at the window. “ But truly he *is* grown, one would not say I was two years older than he ! Ah ! they have seen us ; father waves his hand, and Aymon is kissing his finger-tips,” and Renée nodded and waved energetically in return.

“ There they are round the corner—I hear their horses’ hoofs on the stone pavement of the court. *Maman*, may I go to the door ?”

“ But, certainly, little one—see, I will go with thee. Ah, but it is good to see them come safely home ! Saying which, Madame la Comtesse de Kerdec’h swept her rich velvet skirts in the wake of her daughter across the salon and over the marble pavement of the entrance hall.

If Mademoiselle’s quicker movements gained her the first kiss of father and brother, the greetings received by Madame were not less warm, and it was she who hung upon her husband’s arm and looked up into the finely-moulded, aristocratic face, with the delicate eyebrows and hair, just beginning to be powdered by age, which belonged to the Comte de Kerdec’h. By the tender look in hers, it would seem that she loved that face ; and yet to most eyes there was a hardness, a sternness in it, as of one who would press on to the mark, set for attainment by the owner’s will, without

much ruth for what the feet must trample to reach it : an unbending Draco, who would carry out a severe law to the very last letter.

“ M. le Comte is very just,” was a common comment on him, but it was hardly said in praise ; and if few could blame, few seemed to love him. There was one thing which, as some said, could warp this fine-drawn justice beyond the hard straight line which divides it from tyranny, and that was a breath on the proud name he bore. Touch that, were it but by a whisper, and the punishment might be more than just ; not only the pound of flesh, but the blood with it. Yet withal the De Kerdec’hs did not stand ill among the landlords of their day, and not a few among the peasants on their estates would have given their right hands for Madame.

“ Ah ! Raoul, how good it is to see thee back !” murmured the little Countess, looking fondly up in her husband’s face with her soft dark eyes. “ It seems so long since we parted, and the weather has been so dreary —ah ! so dreary.”

She shivered a little, and a grave smile dawned on his severe countenance.

“ So dreary ? Ah ! not to-day, at any rate ; the sun on the snow has been almost too brilliant. Things look brighter here in our Brittany than they do in Paris, I can tell thee, little wife.”

“ Ah ! yes, tell me about Paris. I used to think it must

be nice there in winter time. I remember when you took me there, just after we were married, Raoul ; it was not winter then, but ah ! how beautiful it was and how bright ! Blanche de Flohic, who was my friend as a girl, married a gentleman of the Court, and I used to envy her a little——ah ! now, don't look so grave, it was before I knew thee, my friend !”

“ Did I look grave, Glauda ? Well, I was not thinking of that ; but there are sad things to be seen and heard in Paris now-a-days. We in the country are far better off —far better, even when it is dreary weather, as thou sayest, little wife. But we will talk further afterwards. There's Aymon—the lad's starving ; we have pushed on too quickly, since the diligence set us down, to think of eating.”

“ To get home the faster ? Ah ! my friend, that was good ! But come, you shall have your reward. Supper's served, and it is a *good* one—I saw to that.”

“ And how is Renaud ? ” asked the Comte, presently, when, having removed his travelling-dress, and satisfied the first pangs of hunger, he was able to think a little about other things of less pressing moment.

“ Renaud ? Oh, much as usual ! He has not left his room since we parted from thee, dear friend.”

“ Not left his room ? How is that ? Henri should have seen to it ; it is not good for him to be cooped up like that.”

“ Alas ! dear friend, but when the mind——”

The Count's brow contracted.

"Hush, Glauda," he said, putting up his hand, "It pains me to hear this strange illness spoken of like that. There *is* hope—there *must* be ! Heaven knows—" he stopped in agitation.

Madame de Kerdec'h looked up quickly.

"Ah, yes, dear Raoul, everyone knows—everyone admires. If ever man had a devoted brother it is Renaud. Alas ! poor soul, if devotion could save him, he has it and plenty."

The Count averted his face.

"Enough," he said, "we will adjourn to his room after supper. I consulted a famous physician in Paris, and he particularly recommends cheerful society and conversation. Well, Aymon, my son, hast satisfied the wolf?"

Mademoiselle Renée started.

"The wolf, dear Father?"

"Ay, mademoiselle, the wolf ! Didst ever see a boy eat like that before ? Thou hadst none such in thy convent, I'll be bound."

Aymon laughed.

And she never had such a day's journey as *we* have had, I'll be bound. *Hu-u !* I can guess now how those poor *canaille* feel whom we saw in Paris, swaying by the cord at the bakers' doors, waiting their turn to be served with pennyworths of bread."

"How was that, Aymon?"

“ How was that, sister? Yes, yes, you in the convent know little enough how it feels to be starving, I’ll warrant. Fast-days? Yes, yes, I know—a little fish instead of a great deal of meat, that’s all it is with you. No, sister, those Paris people’s fasting is quite another matter.”

“ Well, since we have broken *our* fast so well, we will go to your uncle’s room, children,” said the Count, rising from table. “ Come, Renée, don’t look so grave; thou art too tender-hearted, little one. It is sad enough about the Paris people, without doubt; but they are sadly tumultuous and impertinent, sometimes; and if they were to be too well-fed, who knows where their insolence might stop. Fancy an old dame shaking her fist at her Majesty’s carriage-window one day. Ah! I thought that would bring back the colour, little one.”

M. de Kerdec’h rose, took a wax light, and went upstairs, followed by his family.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHEVALIER DE KERDEC'H.

Man. Forgetfulness—

First Spirit. Of what—of whom—and why?

Man. Of that which is within me; read it there—

Ye know it, and I cannot utter it!

—BYRON.—*Manfred.*

AFTER traversing several passages, the Count stopped at a door in the west wing of the château, before which hung a tapestry curtain. This he pushed aside, put up his hand to knock, withdrew it, and remained listening.

Music was coming from within—the strange wild music of the Breton national instrument—the *biniou*, a species of bagpipes. Presently this ceased, and a voice began to sing some words to an odd, wailing chant—monotonous, yet with a strange ring of bitterness in it, rising at times to a sharp agony. It was a man's voice that sang—a voice which would have been a fine one but for occasional discords, which showed that it was not quite under the singer's control.

The words of the chant were Breton, and may be roughly translated thus:—

“‘ Like a flowery field o'er which the bitter herbs have crept, is my soul o'erwhelmed with anguish.

“ ‘ My sorrow is continual ; I drink my grief with every breath, and am as the dove, reft of her mate.

“ ‘ My loving heart broke in two parts when I learnt this news : some of my friends told me
That slanderers were busy in culling a bouquet for
me and my heart’s beloved.

“ ‘ A bouquet to separate us, my sweet mistress and me ;
a bouquet composed of four flowers :
Grief, melancholy, sorrow of spirit, and care.

O, miserable calumniators ! — ’ ”

Here M. de Kerdec'h knocked, and the voice broke off.
An elderly man-servant came to the door and opened it.

“ M. le Comte is then returned ? ” he said, respectfully.

“ Yes. Can M. Renaud receive us this evening ? ”

“ Certainly. Enter *messieurs et mesdames*.”

He opened the door, spoke for a moment in a low voice to
the occupant of the room, and retired into the background.

There were wax lights burning here, as in the salon down-stairs. Thick curtains were drawn before the windows, and a wood fire crackled merrily ; a white French poodle lay before it, his frilled paws spread out to the warmth, his little pink nose resting upon them, his small pinkish eyes blinking at his master, who sat in a high-backed chair with his face turned from the door. He was a younger man than his brother the Count ; tall and massive in figure, but with a stoop of the shoulders which bespoke ill-health. The hands, long and blue-veined, were fingering

the chanters of the biniou ; the pale, blue eyes were half-closed in dreamy fashion, their long dark lashes almost resting on the white cheek. The mouth was weak, the forehead high, but not broad, and the hair which shaded it, in odd incongruity with the still youthful face, was white as snow. Such was the Chevalier Renaud de Kerdec'h, only brother of the Count.

“Good evening, Renaud,” said the latter, taking the pale hand in cheery fashion, and trying hard to smooth out the crimp of pain which came to his brow at the sight of the invalid ; “Good evening, brother ; I hope I see thee well ?”

“Well, well,” said the Chevalier, “as usual, brother, as usual—no otherwise. Be seated, madame, and mademoiselle, and you——?” He looked up with a questioning, puzzled expression.

“Aymon, dear brother,” said the Comtesse, gently, “Don’t you remember our son Aymon? There, my son embrace thy uncle.”

Aymon obeyed in silence. The Chevalier nodded two or three times, waved his hand towards the chairs, and then went on in his uncertain voice :—

“I was trying over something. Will you pardon me a moment if I go on? It might slip from me else ; things do so evade me now-a-days. I don’t know how it is, but all feels so loose and slippery *here*.”

The long-fingered, transparent hand went up to the pale

brow, which knit slightly, as though its owner were seeking for some truant thought.

“What was it—what was it?” he murmured, as if speaking to himself—“as usual, ‘tis gone—gone—gone! Henri——” his voice took a sharp, querulous tone, as he turned to address the valet, who was waiting in the background. “Henri, come here, tell me what it was, quick!”

The man took up the biniou which his master had laid aside, and replaced it in his hands; then he bent down and whispered a word. The Chevalier’s face cleared.

“Ah! yes, yes,” he murmured, as he fingered the pipes. “Yes, yes, that was it;—yes, yes.”

He filled the bag, played over again the same wild, melancholy air which had been interrupted by the entrance of his visitors; then, keeping the pipes still on his knee, he continued the melody with his voice, repeating the last three words which had been on his lips when he was disturbed:—

“O miserable calumniators! wherever ye go does suffering follow you. Compared to you the plague is sweet.

“Your goading words would move the very stones to rise and gnaw each other.

“But thou whom I love, oh! be faithful, and I will be so. Be faithful, and wicked tongues will have no power to part us.

“Our hearts are like a rock in the wide sea when storm-winds rage.

“The corner-stone of love has been laid betwixt us,
God be thanked !

“Thou art wise, my sweetheart ; and thou knowest, to
conquer, one must know how to fight.”

“Ah, mon Dieu !”

The singer’s voice quavered and broke. He covered his face, gave a long shuddering sigh, and rocked himself to and fro on his chair, as if in pain. M. de Kerdec’h turned away his head ; half rose, then sat down again, and looked appealingly at the valet. The latter made a little sign in indication of his master, and put his finger to his lips.

A painful constraint fell on the little party—none dared speak or move. Presently, however, the Chevalier’s mood seemed to alter ; his face lighted as quickly as it had clouded ; he took his hands from his eyes, and turned to his visitors with a smile.

“What do you think of it?” he asked. “Not bad, is it?”

“Bad? No, indeed, it is beautiful,” returned the Countess, with a kind smile, seeing that her husband made no remark. “Our Breton melodies are always beautiful, and I like the words, too ; only this *sône* is a little too sad. Is it not, Monsieur mon beau-frère?”

“Yes, it is sad,” answered the Chevalier, meditatively ; “but what would you have, sister? Winter weather is not the time for roses ; and when it is winter *here* and *here* (he laid his hand on heart and brow), can you expect

a merry measure or gay words? Ah, no, sister, never again—never again."

He turned and looked into the fire with a sigh.

"Did *you* make it, uncle?" asked Renée, presently, lifting her little bright, dark face, in which the fire, before which she was seated, with the poodle's head on her knees, had made the blush-roses bloom like damask ones.

"What a question, Renée!" broke in Aymon, roused out of the constraint from which he had suffered ever since he came into his uncle's room; for, to the healthy lad whose childhood had been passed with pleasant companions on the wind-swept Carnac heath, this shut-in room, with its dainty luxuries and hushed stillness, suited to the invalid life passed there, was anything but congenial.

"What a question!" he exclaimed, in a voice that made the invalid start. "Hast thou never heard it before? Why, it is old Père Guenedon's favourite *sône*; and Tailor Kabik—you should all have heard how he used to sing it when he came in to the farm to do a day's work for the foster-parents! 'Twas enough to make a cow laugh to hear him howl out, "O miserable calumniators!" as he drove the needle through the cloth, sitting cross-legged on the table with his hump sticking up above his head; and he always made his "loving heart break in two parts" when he cut out a patch with the big shears. Oh! but *that* was worth hearing, it was! And then Christophe, too, *he* used to sing

it sometimes, when—well, when the mists were on him—you know. Oh! yes, it's not the first time by many a hundred that *sône* has been sung."

A puzzled, troubled look had stolen over the Chevalier's face as his nephew spoke. His dreamy blue eyes fixed themselves earnestly on the boy; then the brow knit, and the pale fingers clasped and unclasped each other uneasily.

"Is it," he began hurriedly, as Aymon ceased, "Is it, then, one of the old *sônes*? I couldn't tell whether I had heard it before, or whether——" he paused a moment, then went on, in a low, confidential voice, turning to Madame de Kerdec'h—"It suited so well, you know, sister, that I half thought—I did, indeed, I *almost* believed that I had composed it. I used to be reckoned a poet once, madame; I don't know whether you are aware of it? It was before — before — what was it?" The former searching look came back to his eyes, and his hand went up to his head.

"Excuse me," he continued, presently, "I pray you all kindly to excuse me, my memory is not what it was." A wintry smile flickered on the delicate features, as the invalid bowed with a high-bred courtesy, so piteous from one in his condition that it brought tears to the kindly eyes of the Countess, and caused Monsieur de Kerdec'h to turn away with a stifled groan. Again that painful silence fell, and every one was thankful when Madame de Kerdec'h

reminded her husband that they had not yet heard all the news from Paris.

“ Didn’t I tell you,” said the Count, seizing almost eagerly on his wife’s suggestion, “ Didn’t I tell you the great news? No! Renaud, this should interest thee, I think; in former times it used to be one of thy dreams that the lower orders should be allowed a voice in public affairs. Well, thou wilt have thy wish, brother; Necker has decided to assemble the States-General.

“ The States-General! ” A sudden flash of intelligence illumined the hazy face of the invalid. “ *Mon Dieu*, can it be? At last, at last, after years, the people will be heard! Old Miorcec will be glad; better times will be coming for them, and then—perhaps—But no, it is too late, too late! Alas! alas!

The light died from his eyes, and his head sank upon his breast with a heavy sigh.

“ Yes,” continued M. de Kerdec’h, with a visible effort, “ there has been a second Convention of Notables assembled to settle some preliminaries; the elections are to begin in January, and then—”

“ Then *what*, dear Raoul? ” asked the Countess, seeing that her husband paused and turned his head abstractedly towards the door.

“ Then probably the deluge, which a certain great lady, whose name I do not care to mention before my little Renée there, foretold was to follow upon the follies

of her days. If it were not disloyal to criticise our good king's judgment, I should say it was worse than folly to give the people the rein now ; they are ready to break out the moment the curb is loosened. Yes, Renaud is right ; it is——So, *I thought* I was not mistaken. What is it, sirrah ? Why do you stand out there knocking with a glove of velvet ? Can't you come in ? ”

CHAPTER III.

“IT HAUNTS ME LIKE A PHANTOM.”

“There stands a spectre in your hall.”

—TENNYSON—“*Lady Clara Vere de Vere.*”

THE door opened slowly, and the hoary head of the old butler was pushed in. He had been in the family since boyhood, and had known the present seigneur as a baby and yet he shared in the common awe.

“Monsieur,” he began, half pompously, half timidly, “Monsieur——”

“Well?” answered M. de Kerdec'h, impatiently, “What is it?”

“I *said* that Monsieur was occupied, that he could not be disturbed; I did indeed; but——”

The old man hesitated.

“*Can't* you speak out,—who is it wants me? If you *said* I was not to be disturbed, why on earth do you come and do it!” exclaimed the seigneur, sharply, the suppressed suffering, which the sight of his brother's pitiable state evidently caused him, venting itself on the old servant.

“A thousand pardons, Monsieur,” answered the latter, advancing a step with a deprecating bow; “indeed I did

not wish to disturb your lordship, but the fellow *would* have me go ; he said you were sure to see him if you knew —though I'm sure I don't know—such an ill-conditioned *canaille* as he is ! ”

“ Did he give his name ? ”

“ He did not ; but—Monsieur will pardon me if I repeat his beggar's language ? He said he had once done Monsieur a service, that Monsieur would remember one night in the white month,* and——”

A strange expression, which almost seemed to denote fear, came over the firm, delicate features of the Count ; but he recovered himself in a moment, turned towards his brother to see if he were listening, satisfied himself that, so far, the attention of the invalid had not been attracted, then rose hastily and went to the door.

“ Did the fellow say anything more, Antonn ? ” he asked, in a low voice, with his back to the room and one hand on the half-open door.

“ No, Monsieur.”

“ What is he like ? ”

“ Like ? Monsieur may well ask that, before he consents to see such a rascally-looking fellow,—if, indeed, he be good enough to see him at all ! If Monsieur will permit me to say as much, if *I* were in Monsieur's place, I——”

“ Enough ! Please to remember that you are valet, and I am seigneur, and, as there is not much chance of our

* The Breton name for January.

changing places, you need not trouble to say what you would do if you were in mine. *Now*, will you tell me what the man is like?"

The old butler reddened at the sarcasm, but he trembled also, and, with another bow, answered shortly—

"A short, big-boned fellow, Monsieur, with dark, straight locks, sharp eyes, lanthorn jaws, and a cunning look about him altogether; though he's smooth-tongued enough; he *looks* as though he could be impudent; and, as for his clothes, they're as ragged as—"

"A klaskervara?" asked the Count, interrupting him hastily.

"No, a pillawer; Monsieur will excuse me for mentioning such a thing before him."

"A pillawer?" The Count repeated the word slowly, as though it did not fit in with some image, which had evidently been called up in his mind by the above description. "A pillawer? Are you sure?"

"Monsieur may well ask that," replied the old butler, indignantly. "The impudence of such a fellow to come here—here to Château Kerdec'h! It's scarcely credible. But it's true, Monsieur, for he actually had the face to ask the scullery-maid if she had any rags! I'd have slammed the door on his beggar's nose, if I'd been she.*

"Hush, Antonn, not so loud; you will disturb M. le Chevalier and the ladies. Show the fellow into the yellow cabinet. I will see him directly."

* It is considered an insult to a Breton household to be asked for rags

“Monsieur is very good,” answered the old servant, with a look of surprise; he paused a moment, as if about to say something more; but a glance at his master’s face checked him, and he merely bowed and withdrew.

“Why should Monsieur see such a good-for-nothing? He is not generally so ready to see such scum, soliloquised he, as he went reluctantly to carry the message.

“A pillawer?” muttered the Count, as he closed the door and returned into the room. “Strange. He was certainly a klaskervara, that one, and these bread-seekers do not often change their condition. Can it be the same, I wonder? *Parbleu!* it is unpleasant enough, but I suppose I must see him.”

“What is it, Raoul, my friend?” asked the Countess, in her soft voice, as her husband came back to the fire.

“Nothing, sweetheart, nothing,” he returned, carelessly, “only some peasant fellow who asks to speak with me—come to beg, I suppose!”

“But thou wilt not see him to-night, my friend? It is late, and thou art tired. See, Raoul, we will send him this” (she drew a small coin from an embroidered bag which hung at her side). “Shall Aymon take it, my friend? Here, Aymon, and tell them to give him some bread; perhaps the poor fellow is starving, like the Paris people.”

The Count made a quick motion to stop the boy.

“No,” he said, hastily, “I will go myself. Good night,

brother ; and do not wait for me, Glauda. Thou art right, I *am* tired, and will go straight to bed when this little affair is seen to. Good night, sweetheart ; good night, children ; sleep well, and don't dream of the Paris people, little Renée."

He was gone before they could make another objection.

"How good he is," said the Countess, with a soft little sigh, "how just! There are not many seigneurs who would disturb themselves for a peasant like that. Imitate thy father, Aymon, my son ; thou couldst not have a better example."

Meanwhile, grumbling to himself at what he considered the unnecessary courtesy shown to one who had so insulted the De Kerdec'hs as to ask for rags at their door, old Antonn slowly descended to the lower regions. It is certainly hard to go back to a man, carrying a message which shows him to be in the right and you in the wrong, after haughtily and scornfully assuring him of the impossibility of such a contingency. And yet this is what the old retainer—who had only been induced to carry the rag-merchant's message by the certainty which he felt that it would be in vain—now had to do. It must be confessed, however, that he fulfilled his humiliating mission with the greatest possible dignity.

"*Tonyk*," he said, pompously, indicating the pillawer, who still stood at the back door, while he addressed a young lackey in the most careless tone at his command,

"show that fellow into the yellow cabinet; M. le Comte deigns to say that he will see him at his leisure."

"*Whew-w!*" exclaimed the lackey, who had been passing the time in a little friendly chaff with the pretty scullery-maid about the application which she had received for rags, "So the master will see him, after all! Well, well, there's nothing like impudence. He wouldn't see *my* old mother the other day, though, when she called about a little reduction in her rent. Ay, ay; he's very *just*, is M. le Comte. I should like to know what *this* one wants, though; dost think he's come to ask for thy hand, Françéza? He's of opinion thou hast a fair dowry, eh? of rags? Ha! ha!"

"Hold thy tongue, great-mouth!"* exclaimed Antonn, crossly. "Do thy duty, and don't talk so much."

"Yes, yes, ill-temper runs all along the cord from top to bottom," growled Tonyk, as he turned to obey. "When the master's put out, the lackey is not long in getting the benefit, be it at first or second-hand. Come, now, Mr. Pillawer, don't keep me waiting. This way!"

"Don't keep me waiting, indeed! He's kept *me* long enough, and in the cold, too,—curse these aristocrats!" muttered the pillawer between his chattering teeth, as he moved out of the freezing air, and shuffled his numb feet along the passage and up a stone stair. "But I'll make them pay for it—for that and other little debts. Yes, yes.

* Breton *guenowek*—imbecile.

Hey! good evening, M. le Comte," added the vender of rags, finishing his soliloquy aloud, as the lackey flung open the door of the yellow cabinet and ushered him in.

The Count was already there, standing with his back to the fire-place, where the wax lights were lit in the sconces on either side.

"He's been in a big hurry to see Monsieur the Rag Merchant, anyhow," thought Tonyk, looking curiously at the pair, as they stood facing each other. They were, indeed, a strange contrast. The Count, tall, slight, and delicately finished, from the proudly-carried head, with its keen, bright eyes and clear-cut features, down to the small, well-shaped hands and feet. Aristocrat was stamped on the whole man, his very clothing looked courtly from its perfect fit and sober richness of tint and texture.

The rag-merchant's apparel was, perhaps, the first thing about him to catch the eye; it was such a complete advertisement of his trade—soiled, threadbare, faded, and ragged to the last degree. For the rest, Antonn had described him fairly enough; but his thick-set frame looked shorter and thicker, his big bones and loose joints more awkward and clumsy beside the fine, well-knit figure of the Count.

On one point, however, the low-born, ill-looking knave had the advantage over the high-bred, handsome nobleman; and this did not fail to strike the sharp eyes of the lackey, as he ushered in the visitor. The pillawer,

a stranger on sufferance among surroundings he must have been quite unaccustomed to, looked cool, determined, and self-possessed ; while the Count, albeit on his own ground, and quite aware of conferring a favour by consenting to see a suppliant of low degree at an untimely hour, showed a degree of nervous uneasiness very unusual with him. His keen eyes dilated with an expression very like dismay as they met those of the pillawer, and his face grew a shade paler.

Tonyk lingered in the doorway.

“Enough, fellow !” exclaimed M. de Kerdec’h ; “ You may go ; I will send for you if I want you.”

The tone was sharp—much sharper than Tonyk was accustomed to hear from his well-bred master, and it nettled him.

“Fellow, indeed !” he muttered, as he shut the door. “I may go—may I ? Thanks, M. le Comte, I’ll not go far, in *case* you should want me. I may as well give the old mother some idea of how the gentry receive a peasant, against the time when she has the honour of an interview—supposing that ever comes ; and—well, I think I smell a rat !”

The man made a noisy exhibition of going away, then stole back on tiptoe, bent his ear to the lock and listened.

The moderate curiosity which had touched the dignified butler, was a thirst with the lackey, which the slightest scent of a mystery drove him to quench by the first means

which came to hand. But the door was strong and the coveted stream filtered out but sparsely. Only now and then, when, under the excitement of conversation, the voices were raised from their usually low, cautious tone, could Tonyk catch anything like intelligible sentences. The first thing which gave him any satisfaction came from the pillawer.

"Surely," he was saying, in rather an excited tone,— "surely, Monsieur is not one to grudge a man his wages when he does him a good turn?—specially when the work was such as did not quite square in with conscience. The priest would have made me do——"

Here there came a "*hush!*" from the seigneur, and the voices sank again. But it was not for long.

"Was paid, did you say?" exclaimed the pillawer's voice, losing its respectful tone. "Yes, but how much? And these sort of jobs require a running account—I can tell you that, sir. I told you I was wanting a little advance on account of losses in trade; and yet, though I've given you no trouble for I don't know how long, you refuse. Well, sir, I've got a tongue in my head—please to remember that."

"Peace, villain!" answered the Count, in a voice less under control than before. I told you last time you'd had ten times what you were promised; so take yourself off at once, and let me hear no more of you."

"Then I'll coin my words."

“ You dare not. You know that——”

The last words were inaudible.

“ I’ll risk it, though,” came from the rag-vendor again, in a tone of such insolence that Tonyk absolutely trembled for the result.

“ Look here, I give you till Monday, my fine gentleman, and then if I don’t get the money from you, I’ll get it from——”

“ Silence, fellow !” thundered the Count, and, immediately after, the door was thrown open, so suddenly that the eavesdropper would have been discovered in the act had the master been cool enough to see him before he slunk away down the dark passage opposite.

“ Antonn ! Tonyk ! Jean-Baptiste ! Where are you, knaves ?” called the master, in a loud voice.

“ That’s right, Tonyk,” he continued more quietly, as the eavesdropper, eager to see the end, reappeared on the scene, “ Show this fellow out, and *at once*—d’ye hear ?”

“ Yes, Monsieur, certainly.”

“ *Au revoir, M. le Comte,*” said the indomitable rag-merchant, with a low bow, as he followed the lackey,—“ Monsieur will do me the favour to remember our little arrangement for Monday ? *Ça, ça, au plaisir !*”

He turned again at the head of the stairs, bowed again with a meaning smile and an affectation of great courtesy and respect, then disappeared in the wake of Tonyk.

M. de Kerdec’h continued standing on the threshold of

the yellew cabinet with hand raised and finger pointing in the direction of the staircase, till his unwelcome visitor was out of sight. Then, as the footsteps died away, he let his hand fall at his side, the look of angry scorn gradually died from his features, his proud, firm jaw dropped, and he put his hand wearily to his forehead.

"Back again," he muttered, "back again! It haunts me like a phantom, and yet it is so long ago! But I must make a stand against this vampire," he continued, recovering himself. "I *will* not have him come troubling me thus. I will end it at once and for ever. Why should *I* care for his threats—*I*, Raoul de Kerdec'h? No, no; let him threaten; it is time to have done with such weakness."

He lit his candle with a hand whose tremor he stilled by force of will, shut the door of the yellow cabinet, and mounted the stair which led to the bedrooms with a firm step, and a face as proudly controlled as those of any of the ancestors who looked down at him from the walls.

CHAPTER IV.

D O W N - T R O D D E N .

“ What made those holes and rents
In the dock’s harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness? ’Tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute’s intents.”

R. BROWNING—“ *Childe Roland.*”

WHILE the Count was refreshing himself by the warm home-hearth and the pillawer waiting at his door, another little scene was going on in the cold, snowy world, which stretched beyond the castle-gates.

Cold, indeed, it was. The red glow of sunset had died out from window and sky, and an ashen grey shimmer, which was neither light nor darkness, was creeping over the colourless earth. What can be colder and more ghostly than the moon-dawn over the snow, when a thin frosty veil is falling, like impalpable gossamer, between earth and sky?

Cold, indeed, they seemed to feel it, those three figures, moving slowly along the lane outside the gates of Château Kerdec’h. A tall, powerfully-built lad came first, leading a pack-horse, strongly-made, like himself; but whether boy or beast were gaunter and more hungry-looking, it would have been hard to say. The steed was old and

broken-spirited ; his leader young, with the man's high birth-right of will and courage, not perhaps quite quenched from eye and lip and gait ; that was about all the difference. The little brown donkey, which brought up the rear, toiling along bravely between its panniers through the snow-choked lane, in spite of hungry look and cruel marks of whip and staff seaming back and shoulders, looked in better case, both as to mind and body, than either of them. But, then, what can exhaust the dogged patience and sturdy power of endurance of the little despised creature, whose rough, brown back bears the cross from birth to death, and which can thrive, like the merry gold-finches, on the very thistles by the way ?

Rags hung on each of the trio ; they filled the donkey's panniers, they piled the old horse's back, they clung, scanty and fluttering, like the last brown leaves in the hedge-rows, to the gaunt form of the tall lad. Now and then, as the evening wind rustled these latter with its faint, freezing breath, and sent them slowly tumbling on to the snow at his feet, the boy would put up his hand with a strong shiver, as though he feared his tattered garments would share a like fate.

The cold grew more and more intense, freezing the breath of the three wayfarers in a strong white rime wherever it touched, wringing the colour from the boy's pale lips and fingers, and trying the broken wind of the poor toiling animals ; and yet they struggled along, not

continuously forwards—there would at least have been some hope in that, hope of a warmer goal at the journey's end—but backwards and forwards, up and down, as though they were waiting for someone, and the cold would not let them do it passively.

The daylight faded more and more, the moonlight gained on it, struggled with the haze and fell through it in long blue beams on to the snow. Gigantic shadows stole out of their lurking places and crept alongside the light, and stars began to show in the dim infinite of the wintry sky. The boy looked up at them now and then, and sighed heavily; looked towards the gate which shut in the long beechen avenue of the château, and sighed again. A clock struck in the great house, a dog barked; he drew the old horse's rein, and stopped a moment to listen; but no step crunched the hard snow under the beeches.

The boy drew a long, weary breath, and moved on again. The old horse stumbled as it got again into motion, and wheezed painfully as it recovered its footing; the little brown donkey, as though from sympathy, uttered a long, melancholy bray.

Then the boy spoke, very softly, very pitifully, to his fellow-sufferers.

“Poor Loizik, poor Mylio,” he said, “you're tired, aren't you, poor little ones? Ah, yes, it's very cold, very cold!”

With his disengaged hand he stroked the old horse's

drooping head, seeing which the little brown donkey pressed up to him and leant its small cold muzzle against his arm.

“ Mylio, little one, is it thou ? ” murmured the boy again. “ Poor little friend, I wish I had something for thee, I wish—— ”

He threw his arm round the little creature’s brown neck, leant his head between the long, soft ears, and a deep, heavy sigh, which was almost a moan, heaved his breast. But the head was quickly lifted again, and a sign sent the little animal back to his place.

“ There,” he said, in a more determined tone, “ I won’t wait any longer ; he can’t be coming back to-night. Poor beasts, I won’t have you killed with cold and hunger, to please him ; no, not if he were a thousand times my father ! ” He shuddered as the word passed his lips ; then, turning his face from where the Château de Kerdec’h stood dark against the evening sky, he whistled to the animals to follow him and stepped on quickly down the lane.

They had left the château some distance behind them, and the walls and towers of an old town, cresting a steep hill and girt by a moonlit river, were just beginning to loom through the uncertain light, when quick steps followed hard after them on the snow-covered road. Neither boy nor animals heard the sound, the *crunch, crunch* of their own five pair of feet prevented that ; and

it was not till a snarling “*Sac-r-r-r-e!*” and the crack of a heavy whip cut through the frosty air, that they turned their heads to see a dark figure coming nearer and nearer over the snow.

A simultaneous tremor ran through each of the three wayfarers at the sight. In the beasts of burden this was produced by downright terror; but the white face of the lad betrayed a mixture of feelings, among which a strong disgust was the most apparent.

“*Halte là!*” exclaimed the disagreeable voice of the newcomer; and, at the word of command, all three stopped.

“Ah, ha, my fine lad, *I'll* teach thee to go off and leave thy parent in the lurch! Didn't I tell thee to wait for me? Didn't I, now? *Sacre!* didst think it likely I would want to travel all the way in this cursed snow from Kerdec'h to Dinan on Shank's Nag, when I possess those two brutes? *Diable!* I had enough of that before my blessed brother (heaven rest his soul!) got out of this wicked world and left me his shoes. *Holà*, now, thou great mouth, answer me if thou canst, or by Saint Corneille——”

He raised his whip and glared at the boy; but the latter, though a full head taller than his persecutor, and, even at his young age, nearly as strong-looking, stood dumb and white, as though struck by that inexplicable spell which holds a poor animal helpless before a serpent's eye.

“Speak, then, thou imbecile! why didst not wait?”

"I *did*," faltered the boy. "I stayed far longer than you told me; but when I saw the poor animals——"

"Curse the animals, and thee, too!" exclaimed the man, with an oath; then, as though he had only been waiting to force an answer before letting loose his passion, he struck at the little donkey with his sabotted foot and sent the long lash of his heavy whip curling indiscriminately round the boy and the old horse he was leading. "There! take that, and get along with you for a set of useless beasts!" he said, savagely. "We'll never get into Dinan to-night at this rate."

The little donkey took the kick quietly enough—poor beast, it was used to such!—it did no more than give out a sobbing pant, and struggle forward as far out of its tormentor's reach as the narrow track would allow. The old horse too, though the blow fell on a place where the bone had worn through the skin of its shoulder, causing it to utter a scream of pain, attempted no retaliation. It remained for the spirit of the human being to resent the insult and injustice, more stinging even than the cruel lash.

Wroth, even more for the poor animals than for himself, the lad faced round, white and trembling, raised his clenched fist, and, with his dark eyes flashing fire, took a step towards the angry man.

The latter drew back, and a quick change passed over his mean features.

“What! Christophe!” he said, in an altered voice.
“What! wouldest strike thy father?”

“The boy’s hand fell immediately, the fire died out of his eyes, the proud defiance from his attitude, and he stepped back to the horse’s head, without a word.

“*Allons!*” said the master, as though satisfied with his victory. “Forward! march! Mylio here looks the fresher of the two beasts; he shall have the honour of carrying me!”

He laughed disagreeably at his own joke, vaulted on to the little donkey behind the panniers, and, with legs dangling down nearly to the snow, rode on, quite indifferent to the way in which the animal laboured under its double burden. With kicks from his wooden shoes he forced the little creature through the snow at the side of the road, and made it take the lead, while the old pack-horse and his driver brought up the rear.

Poor Christophe! it was only three years since he left Carnac, and yet even Ninorc’h, his tender foster-mother, would scarcely have known him now.

It was not so much the change in his outward appearance, great as that was; for, from a stalwart, healthy boy, he had grown into a pale, thin stripling, with a frame too large for its coverings, fleshy as well as textile, and a face from which cruel suffering had well-nigh scored out the last traces of the careless child. Cleanliness had given way to squalor, neatness to rags; but

there was worse behind. The down-cast eyes, the drooping head, the general depression of the once upright figure, all betrayed a spirit which, if not yet quite broken, was nearly so. Hope seemed to have vanished utterly in the swamp of black despond ; and the onward look, so long clung to even by those who have been met by disappointment too often, when they hoped to see happiness come smiling round the next turn in the road of life, had given place to the downward glance, which looks for nothing but to struggle through the journey, and have done with it for ever more. The boy's whole being seemed to have been paralyzed, cowed, lowered, by the fatal change which had come upon him through the finding of a father. How he had longed and prayed for this ! How he had envied his companions what had seemed such a priceless possession ! The idea had been the day-dream of his childhood—it had mingled itself with his holiest aspirations. To find a father on earth, or in Paradise, had been his dearest wish—the want of one, his bitterest sorrow. And now ! It seemed to the boy that God had granted his prayer in anger, in bitter irony, and had made of his heart's desire the curse of his life. Finding his earthly father, he seemed to have lost his heavenly one, for love and trust were gone, and the breaking of the earthly image had shattered for him the celestial prototype. The holy idea of fatherhood had vanished, and in its place stood

that of cruel, inexorable destiny, to which the boy lifted his scared eyes in terror, not in love. Being a Breton, the species of half-superstitious awe with which his countrymen are wont to regard the idea of paternity, even apart from the merits of the individual, still clung to him ; but it was as the Nessus shirt to Hercules, to paralyze, not to warm.

Woe worth the parents who thus desecrate for God's little ones the beautiful sacrament of fatherhood ; in fouling its outward and visible sign, they too often blur for their children the inward and spiritual image divinely reflected there. Of many, indeed, it may be said that they know not what they do ; but let them look to it, for of such offenders it stands written that it were better for them that a mill-stone were hanged about their necks, and that they were drowned in the depths of the sea !

CHAPTER V.

A STROKE OF BUSINESS.

Ste.—“I thank thee for that jest ; here’s a garment for’t ;
Wit shall not go unrewarded while I am
King of this country.”

SHAKESPEARE.—“*The Tempest.*”

“*Holá, Mr. Pillawer, is that you ?*”

It was Sunday afternoon ; the bells of the various churches in Dinan were jangling together for vespers ; the old town was bright with holiday costumes, winter sunshine, and hoar frost ; the ivy which clung to the old ramparts and to Anne of Brittany’s ancient castle, glittered against the coping of snow ; the sky above was hard and blue as *lapus lazuli*. But, among all this bright purity, there was a speck, and a fit background for that speck. The first was to be found in the squalid person of Matelinn Gourven, lord of rags ; the second in the street where he was oftenest to be found when in Dinan, the Rue du Jerzual, emporium of tatters, rascality, bad smells, and glorious picturesqueness. He was coming leisurely up this ancient entrance to the high-seated town—(who could toil up that steep ascent otherwise than leisurely ?)—and was just nearing the old gateway, with its lamp-lit shrine,

which leads to the upper town, when he received the above salutation.

It came from a dapper lackey, in dark blue livery, with a little battlemented tower embroidered in gold on his sleeve, the cognizance, apparently, of some noble family. He was strolling, leisurely also, along the street which crosses at right angles the entrance to the Rue du Jerzual, and, catching sight of the pillawer, paused at the corner to let him come up.

“*Holà!*” he said again, as the rag-merchant, puffing a little, stepped on to level ground—“*Holà, M. le Pillawer, do you want any rags to-day?*”

“Certainly, if I can get them,” answered Matelinn, in no wise abashed; “but, unluckily, they’re all locked up to-day. When finery’s being flaunted, no one likes to have rags to sell—so much the worse !”

“*Ha, ha !*” laughed the lackey, with a glance at his own spruce clothes; “That’s very true, M. le Pillawer. You made a false move when you came to our place the other day—why, man, we were just rigged out for the winter ! And to come to the very door of the Château for the cast-offs ! Did ye think we’d own to them *there*—specially the women ? Why, Mr. Pillawer, ye’re not up to your trade ! Not that I’d object to do a stroke of business with you,” he added, lowering the already confidential voice in which he had been conversing, and drawing his companion further into the shadow. “I’ve several articles I’d not be ashamed

to turn an honest penny by ; but it must be done under the rose. I generally let old Solomon there have them (he indicated an old-clothes shop hard by, with a wave of the hand), but he becomes closer and closer every day, and— Well, I'd rather do business with a compatriot than with a Jew. Hey, M. le Pillawer?"

Matelinn's face, thoughtfully cast down in listening pose, and shaded by his hand, would have been a study all this time to any physiognomist who had been fortunate enough to get a good view of it. Slightly puzzled it was at first, as though he had not fully recognised his interlocutor ; then, at the allusion to his late visit, a sharply observant look came into the little grey eyes, which, as they fell upon the embroidered badge, beamed with the intelligence of one who catches a clue he has been feeling for. Gradually, as the lackey went on, a covert satisfaction grew upon the listener's face, which, on the hint at a wish to open business negotiations, merged into a compound expression of keen intentness: the eagerness of a trader who scents profit, mingling with the still greater eagerness of the intriguer who catches sight of the solution to some secret enigma.

So absorbed was he in feeding his thoughts on the provender just furnished for them, that he did not notice that this had ceased, and that the speaker was waiting for an answer.

The lackey was conscious of having finished with a

remarkably neat bit of flattery ; he felt he had condescended a good deal in addressing such a brotherly phrase to a pillawer, and expected that it would work proportionately to his own advantage in the intended transaction. He was not a little mortified, then, to find that the pillawer made no reply, but continued in the same thoughtful attitude ; his eyes on the ground, his face shaded by his hand.

He waited a moment, then tapped the other on the arm.

“ Hey ! Mr. Pillawer,” he began, in a slightly nettled tone, emphasied by a change to the less respectful pronoun.

“ Didst not hear me, man ? Faith, thou art the queerest sort of customer at the rag trade that *I* ever met. *This* isn’t the way to do business with gentlemen, I can tell thee that much.

The pillawer started.

“ Hey ?” he said, in the hurried way of one suddenly awakened from a dream, “ Monsieur must pardon me for the little abstraction. It was necessary that I should make a small calculation before referring to Monsieur’s very obliging offer. It saves time, which, doubtless, with Monsieur, is valuable.”

He smiled slightly as he made this delicate allusion to the lackey’s hired services ; then glanced up quickly to see if the little bit of tempting wit contained in the *double entendre*, had been bought too dearly. But no, the exceed-

ingly courteous form in which his words had been couched, had not only completely salved the lackey's previously wounded dignity, but had effectually prevented his feeling the delicate sting of the pillawer's satire.

"Then it is settled," said the lackey, when an arrangement, slightly more favourable to a customer than was the usual practice of the rag-merchant to allow, had been concluded—— "I will have the disused clothes of the establishment conveyed into Dinan on Tuesday evening after dark, and you will kindly return the amount in a sealed packet addressed to M. Adam Tonyk.

I shall probably be engaged at that hour, and may not be able to come myself, but you may trust the bearer. M. le Comte returns that evening, you see, or I would certainly do myself—ahem—the honour——"

"M. le Comte? Is he then absent?" interrupted the pillawer, with interest a little too visible.

"Absent? Yes," answered the other. "But that won't matter; I'll arrange."

"Ah! Yes, yes; certainly. But, that master of yours—does he ride by way of Dinan? You see, my friend, he might not like to meet the little bale coming from his château. All prejudice, of course; but, unfortunately, there *is* a feeling against my business."

The lackey thought a moment.

"No, no," he answered, presently; "I'll see to that. It's quite true about his returning through Dinan. But

Madame expects him by seven o'clock, at latest, and I'll not despatch the bale till after that; not that he would notice it though—at least, not in the dark, I think. However, I agree with you, Mr. Pillawer; it's always best to be on the safe side."

"Does he ride alone?" asked the pillawer, with apparent indifference.

"Alone? Yes; I believe so. What makes you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Curiosity, perhaps. The old Adam is bound to be strong in an old-clothes-man—eh, Monsieur?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the lackey, appreciating the sorry joke fully to its maker's satisfaction. "Monsieur is, then, a wit? Ha! ha! that must be good oil to the old wheels. Is it not so, Mr. Pillawer?"

"Well, yes; indifferently so," replied the rag-merchant. "And they need all the oil one can give them; they do, indeed. The old cart doesn't travel too quickly along the road to wealth, I can tell you that, sir. Yes, yes, it's a poor business, though it's an ancient inheritance, and as such *ought* to be honourable—eh?"

But the lackey did not catch the little joke this time; he had caught sight of something more attractive—viz., of the plump figure and rosy face of his fellow servant, Mdlle. Françéza, scullery-maid at the château, coming along the street on her way to vespers, and he did not care to chance being seen by her in familiar conversation with an old-clothes-man. He, therefore, took a hurried leave of his

disreputable-looking acquaintance, and hastened to leave shadow for sunshine, by quitting Matelinn Gourven and the old archway, and going to meet bright little Francéza in the main street.

Matelinn Gourven was not in such a hurry to go on his way. The bells might ring for vespers long enough before attracting him, unless he had some purpose to serve in obeying their time-honoured call; and there was no such occasion to-day. Therefore, he stayed still under the archway and meditated, forming half a thought here and there into soft articulations, and letting it drop outside him, as there was nobody near enough to pick it up. Being a man of small education, he could always think more clearly in this way; it took from the vagueness of the process to hear parts of it occasionally, and not to have it all going on in the soundless dark within.

“So, so, he’s gone away, has he? What does that mean, I wonder?” Silent meditation followed for the space of three minutes.

“Won’t be back till Tuesday evening . . . I had appointed Monday . . . Matelinn Gourven, it’s plain enough . . . *won’t* see thee . . . *Won’t!* Ha! . . . Call again? . . . Lost time . . . From Dinan . . . Ha, yes. Saint Samson! . . . Stay, there’s the other; but . . . Scarcely do . . . No money, probably.

Here there was a long pause, during which no words dropped, the man seemed to be thinking too intently

for that. He stood stock-still, with his hands in his leather belt, and his eyes fastened on no outward images, yet (as the phrase is) fixed on the ground. Presently he drew himself up, his eye flashed, and he rubbed his hands together.

“Praised be Saint Samson!” he murmured, piously, “May he be my aid! Yes, yes, so be it. I’ll have him to myself, anyhow, and then . . . if . . . Well, well, no need to arrange any more now; we’ll see how things go.”

The process was evidently over for the present.

The thinker shook himself, as though to free himself entirely from a burden which had oppressed him; looked this way and that, to make sure he was not observed; stuck his thumbs in his leather belt, and strolled on again.

“Christophe, lad,” he said, coming presently upon a boy sitting with downcast face under the leafless trees of the Place Duguesclin.

“I’ve changed my plans; we’ll do business here till Tuesday evening, and then take to the tramp again. Let me see—” he appeared to reflect—“eastwards, I think. Hast seen to the beasts?”

“Yes.”

The boy did not raise his eyes; the monosyllable dropped out half-sullenly, half-wearily.

“Good.”

Matelinn stood a moment eyeing the lad attentively. "Thou'rt pale my son," he said, presently, "it's but cold comfort sitting here. See—(he took some small coins out of his pouch and tossed them to the lad)—"take these to Mother Lefèvre's and get something to warm thee. *Ça, ça, au revoir*, I'll come anon.

The words were more kindly said than usual; the thought for his son's comfort—so rare, alas! with this father—surprised and touched the desolate boy. He glanced up quickly with a tear in his eye; but the pillawer had already strolled on again. The boy gathered up the coins which had fallen on the snow at his feet, held them a moment in his cold hand, and looked at them. The gathered tear fell on the dirty copper; but the tear was a relief. It was as if this tiny ray of kindness, after weeks of frost, had melted a corner of the ice which stiffened the boy's heart against this man who called him son. Could it be that the man was not *all* bad?

"Since he *is* my father," thought Christophe, rising slowly and stamping his numb feet on the hard ground—"since so it is, would it not be better to try and be more like a son? But oh! my foster-father!—oh, my mother! I would I had been content to know no parents but you! Better the menhir, I think, than—" an unconquerable repulsion, more than the winter's cold, made him shiver from head to foot; but he checked himself.

"No," he murmured, "no, I musn't forget; he *has* been

kind at last ; it was good to spare me these. Four *sous* ! Yes, it must have cost him something to part with them ! " In spite of his newly-formed resolve, the boy's lips curled with an expression very like scorn, as he moved away from under the leafless trees.

CHAPTER VI.

SAINT-SAMSON.

“ Lost, lost ! one moment knelled the woe of years.”

R. BROWNING.—“*Childe Roland*.”

IT was snowing again. The dry feathery flakes fell slowly and sparsely to join their fellows on the frozen ground. The sun had gone down, like a scarlet ball, behind the leafless trees, and darkness was battling with snow-light and moonshine for dominion over the wintry world, when the little cavalcade left Dinan and turned eastward.

It was Tuesday evening. To Christophe, to old Loizik and little brown Mylio, this fact meant nothing, except that it exchanged for them the perambulation of dirty streets for the longer and rougher tramp along country lanes. The dull, plodding round of daily duty was the same to them, whether it fell on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or any other day of the week.

But to the rag-merchant himself, riding silently on old Loizik at the head of the little party, the day was evidently a date of mark ; it mattered a good deal to him that he should ride along this particular road on Tuesday

above all other days, and just at this hour and at no other. This would have been evident, at least to anyone who, holding the clue to some secret purpose in Matelinn's mind, had taken the trouble to observe his actions. Three facts, above all, might have indicated this. He had declined an excellent opportunity for doing business, which had offered itself in the town for the following day, and had refused to leave Dinan in the morning, though he had been told that several cottagers in a village which lay on his proposed route were selling their possessions and quitting the neighbourhood that very afternoon. Moreover—a very significant fact—he had left Dinan without the bale from Château Kerdec'h, and an hour at least before the time at which it could possibly be expected. He was unusually silent and thoughtful, too, as he rode along on the old pack-horse, abstaining both from the oaths and blows, to which those under him were but too well accustomed.

Christophe observed this latter indication, and wondered at it a little in the languid way usual to those in whom interest and expectation have been well-nigh smothered under the hopeless routine of an uncongenial and monotonous life. Of the other and more significant facts he knew nothing, Matelinn Gourven being too close a man of business to confide any more of his affairs than was absolutely necessary to any one—even his own son.

Crunch, crunch, crunch—the tread of their own footsteps over the frozen snow was the only sound which broke the absolute silence, except for the slight wheezing of the pillawer's broken-winded steed, less audible than usual, for there were little or no rags on his back besides those which covered his rider. *Tramp, tramp, tramp*,—they had gone on like this for nearly an hour, and Christophe had gone back in thought to his old home, and was wandering among the little blue gentians and golden furze on Carnac Heath with little Genofa, while his feet plodded mechanically over the snowy roads of northern Brittany, so far away; when old Loizik, coming suddenly to a halt, checked the whole cavalcade.

The boy started from his sunny dream, and awoke to the cold, stern reality of his present surroundings. They were nearing a gate in the hedge where a rough bridle-road led off by a short cut to the Château de Kerdec'h and the country beyond. Clumps of dark fir-trees, the outposts of a little black forest further back, skirted the road, and hid the progress of the bridle-path, which, after the first few yards, entirely lost itself among their dark red boles and snow-laden boughs.

There was a weird mystery, a weariness about the place, which made Christophe shudder involuntarily as he looked at it and wondered if their road led through there. He expected to see the pillawer turn and order him to open the gate, or else make some remark about the way they

should take ; but no, Loizik stood stock-still, with his rider crouching forward somewhat over his neck, looking neither to right nor left.

The lad looked at them in growing astonishment ; waited a minute, and was just going to hazard a question (which, by the by, he had discovered before this *was* rather a hazardous experiment), when a low groan struck upon his ear.

Christophe started, looked to this side and that—before, behind ; but there was no one in sight. Yes, there was no room for doubt, it must have come from the pillawer. He left loose of Mylio's bridle, and went up to where the old horse was standing in the road.

The rag-merchant was leaning forward on the pack-saddle, his two hands grasping the pommel ; his lips were firmly compressed, his face bent down ; otherwise, he looked much as usual.

Again came the low groan.

“ What is it ? ” asked the lad, in a startled voice.

The pillawer made no answer.

“ What is it, father ? ” he asked again, his voice trembling, in spite of him, as he used the unaccustomed name. It was an effort to use it ; but the effort was repaid.

The pillawer turned his head slightly.

“ I am ill, my boy,” he said,—“ ill. This cursed cold has brought on the spasms, and till they pass, I can ride no further. Open the gate, we will go into the wood. I

know a place where 'tis more sheltered ; I will sit down there, and as for thee, thou shalt tether the beasts behind the trees, and then look out for someone passing. I must have help if thou art not to be left fatherless in the wide world, poor child."

What was there about these last words to send such a disagreeable thrill through the lad's blood ? He could not tell. In the mouth of any other father they would have been touching words ; but, somehow, it was no sympathetic feeling which rose to meet them. There was no time for self-questioning ; only the lad was conscious of this strange up-rising within him, and his heart revolted against it as quickly. He was horrified with himself, and the re-action made him more ready to give the man the attention of a son than he had ever been before.

He threw one strong young arm around the bent form on the old pack-horse, took the reins in his other hand, spoke a word or two of encouragement, whistled to the donkey to follow, and moved up to the gate.

This he set open, and led the old horse carefully over the rough path within, the little donkey following close by all the time, as though half-afraid of being left behind in the dim mysterious shades among which they were passing.

A few minutes careful advance brought them to a clump of fir-trees, standing together on the edge of a sort of hollow on one side of the path. From the path itself you could not distinctly see the interior of this shaded hollow ;

but the rag-merchant apparently knew it well, for he made a sign for Christophe to halt and to help him down from old Loizik's back. Leaning against a tree, he directed the lad to tether the beasts where they would be out of sight, and yet within easy reach when wanted ; motioned to him to give him his arm, and led the way with faltering steps among the trees to the edge of the little hollow. Here Christophe saw a strange sight.

A ray of moonlight, coming from the other side where the ground was more open, streamed in, like a long thread of silver, among the dark blue shadows, and lit up the interior of a shallow dip in the ground, lined with snow, but sprinkled thickly over with brown fir-needles from the trees which shaded its brim. At the bottom, and in the very centre of the hollow, was one of those gigantic columns, such as the lad knew so well in his early home, only larger, more massive than most of those he was accustomed to ; looking more imposing, more titanic, perhaps from the fact that it had no companions : it was quite alone—lord of the glade, solitary in this silent solitude.

Neither was it standing erect, as is generally the case with menhirs, but was leaning far out of the perpendicular, bowed with its own weight towards the ground, like a giant full of years. The moonlight struck upon its tall grey head, and on the other side stretched a long black shadow, double its own height, reaching right across and up the slope of the woodland hollow which formed the

shrine for this old-world saint ; for it was a baptized menhir, purified from its heathen uses by holy water, and sanctified with a saintly name.

“ Saint-Samson,” murmured the pillawer, as his son led him down into the hollow. “ Ay, ay, it is well.”

“ There, lad,” he added presently, “ I will sit down here where I can lean my back against the stone. And now listen to me, listen carefully. Dost hear, lad ? ”

The voice was stronger again ; the pillawer looked more like himself. The boy stood attention.

“ Go thou back to the gate and wait there till thou canst see a traveller coming along. (The saints will send one to a poor sufferer, I know that.) But listen, *every* traveller won’t do ; there be men about in these troublesome times would rather mar than mend. The moon is getting up nicely now, and thou canst see a good stretch of road. Directly a traveller comes in sight, step up here and tell me whether it be man or woman, one or many, and I will give thee further directions. Now go, my son, and—may it bring us a blessing ! ”

The last words were added in a changed tone, with a curious gurgle of the throat.

“ Hasten, my son, hasten ! ” called the pillawer after him, as the lad turned away. “ Hasten, for the love of all the saints. Ah, this pain ! ”

The lad did as he was bid. He went back to where the path turned off from the main road, leaned his arms on the

top of the gate and looked earnestly and anxiously, now along the way they had come, then down the short piece of road which was all that was visible in the contrary direction.

Taken by surprise, alarmed and softened by the sudden illness of the hitherto inexhaustable pillawer, he had obeyed his directions without question ; but, as he waited there in the cold, white silence, it struck him that there was something very strange about the entire arrangement.

Why could not he himself have helped his father to proceed to the next village, without waiting for the chance of other assistance, which, at that time in the evening, might never come ? If it were medicine he were waiting for, was a traveller likely to have it ? And was a seat on the cold ground a reasonable cure for spasms, brought on by the severity of the weather ?

He had almost made up his mind to return to the pillawer and persuade him to mount Loizik again and go on slowly towards some shelter better than that of the old menhir, when a slight sound in the distance made him pause, and presently, from the direction of Dinan, he could discern a figure on horseback, riding slowly along the frozen road.

Christophe shaded his eyes with his hand, waited a moment to allow of a nearer view, satisfied himself that the new-comer was a man, and, so far as he could tell, a gentleman too ; took in such other details as could be

seen at the distance and in the light then to be had, and, having done this, stepped back quickly to the hollow where he had left the pillawer.

Matelinn looked up quickly as the lad came near, seemed about to rise, checked himself, and asked in a sharp, eager tone whether anyone were coming. Christophe answered him, was again questioned, and then, the replies appearing satisfactory, was sent back to stop the horseman and ask for help.

“Say it is for a man in mortal extremity,” added the pillawer in the same quick tone. “Conjure him to come in the name of the blessed saints ; do not lose a moment, lad, and waste no time in answering questions if he should put any ; he might object, too, to helping a pillawer—there *are* such folk, even among Christians—more’s the pity ! Hurry, lad, I say, I hear the horse coming near ; if he should pass—ah !”

He half-raised himself again, and his voice, though low-pitched, became strangely hurried and eager as he concluded. Christophe thought that he must be in great suffering, and *his* voice also had a quick, appealing tone, as he ran back to the gate and accosted the horseman who now drew near.

“For God’s sake, sir,” he cried, opening still further the already half-opened gate. “For God’s sake, stop and help us ! He will die, I do believe he will, if he is left any longer there in the cold, and I——”

He did not conclude, for the fiery grey Normandy horse, which the gentleman rode, started violently at the unexpected apparition, reared, darted forward, and then, checked by the strong hand of its rider, stopped as suddenly, snorting and trembling, by the gate.

"What is it? What do you want?" asked the horseman shortly, with attention evidently divided between his restive steed and the tall, ragged boy who stood in the way.

"It is a sick man, Monsieur; he lies down there in sore need of help. Will Monsieur give it?"

"A sick man?" repeated the gentleman, half doubtfully, eyeing Christophe's tattered garments, and then glancing back at his impatient horse,—"A sick man, you say? What can I do for him? Shall I ride on and send help?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur, he is in extremity; he cannot wait. For pity's sake, Monsieur," continued the lad still more urgently, as the gentleman still appeared to hesitate—"for pity's sake come to him at once—he is my father."

The last words were added with an effort, as if to strengthen the appeal; and the boy fixed his dark eyes entreatingly on the traveller.

"Your father? My lad, I would willingly help you, but—my horse? I don't know whether he would let you hold him. Hadn't I better ride on and send—"

"For God's sake, Monsieur, come at once," said the lad, laying his hand on the horse's rein. "He might die before

you could send help, and then—God help us, we should have his life on our hands!" he added, hastily, using the plural, as though struck by a sudden thought which his hearer could not fathom. "Yes, sir, I can hold your horse, or we can tether him?"

"No, he would not stand ; don't you see how frightened he is? You must hold him—that is, if you can."

As he spoke, the gentleman dismounted, patted the trembling horse, said a few encouraging words to him, and throwing the bridle over his arm, turned to Christophe.

"Now, then, where is your father? Lead on ; you shall take the reins when we get there."

The lad pointed towards the group of fir-trees.

"It is there, Monsieur ; quite close," he said ; and, entering the field, led the way towards the hollow.

The horse started again, and trembled more violently as he saw the long black shadows cast by the trees upon the snow, and felt the chilly gloom of the pine-wood closing round him, and it required all his master's powers of persuasion, added to a firm will, which he evidently knew could not lightly be resisted, to induce him to go forward.

It was, indeed, a weird scene, and the gentleman, as well as his steed, drew up suddenly with a start as they came in sight of the menhir of Saint-Samson, rising tall and shadowy from the half-lit gloom of the hollow. The

figure of the pillawer was not visible from where they stood.

Christophe stopped too, and glanced half doubtfully over the edge.

“What is this?” asked the gentleman hastily, as though vexed with himself for the nameless fear his start had betrayed. “What is this? I see no sick man. Surely you are not seeking to deceive me? If I thought——”

“How can Monsieur think so?” exclaimed the boy, half indignantly, half reproachfully. “See, Monsieur”—(he had moved onward a few steps and was pointing down into the hollow)—“See, Monsieur, there he is. Father, I have brought help.”

As the lad spoke, he ran down the slope and bent over a dark object, which the watcher from above could now perceive in the shadow of the menhir.

A deep groan sounded from the hollow, startling a night-bird which flew screaming from the dark branches of a fir-tree, sending down a shower of frozen snow on the heads of those below.

The grey Normandy horse neighed with alarm, and tugged wildly at the rein. Its master was still engaged in quieting it, when Christophe came out of the hollow and stood before him.

“Ah, Monsieur,” he said, and there was a tone in the voice which made the stranger turn quickly and look fixedly at him; “Ah, Monsieur, let me hold the horse now,

and will you go and see if you can do any good to him down there—my father? He asks for you, and oh, Monsieur, he seems in such pain!"

Instead of answering, the stranger still continued his earnest gaze.

"Have I seen you before?" he asked presently. "I seem to know your voice."

"No, Monsieur, I think not. But, oh! don't delay; he won't let *me* do anything, and I fear he will die if he lies there in the cold any longer."

"Very well," answered the other, resisting the strange reluctance he felt to enter the shadowy hollow,—"I will go down and examine your father, and then come back and speak to you about him, and we will see what can be done. Here, you must hold my grey—see, this way. Be gentle with him mind, but keep a firm hold of the reins—so, ho, gently!" as the horse still continued to back away from the hollow. "It's the menhir there that's frightening him, I think; take him out of the shadow, and lead him up and down in the moonlight till I come back; I won't be long."

Giving the rein to Christophe, the gentleman turned away, and went down into the hollow.

At first the lad was too much occupied with the still-restive horse to spare much attention for what was going on by the old menhir. He could hear voices now and then, but the trampling of the grey prevented him from distinguishing what was said, even before he had got beyond

the shade of the fir-trees. Once there, he led the creature gently up and down the bit of road between the wood and the gate, patting its quivering neck and speaking to it in low, caressing tones, till gradually it calmed down, and ceased capering and pulling at the rein. Then Christophe paused a moment to listen. It struck him that the gentleman was long in returning, and—yes, surely the voices were rather loud. It seemed more like an angry discussion than a consultation between a man struck down by sickness and one who had come to his aid. Surely, to be able to speak in so strong a voice, the pillawer must already be much better?

Christophe turned the horse's head again in the direction of the menhir, and was nearing the belt of shade when a faint cry, followed by a deep groan, struck on the night air, causing the grey to plunge violently and trample again, and sending a cold shiver through the boy's heart.

What was it?

Could the pillawer indeed be dying?

The renewed excitement of the horse he was holding hindered the lad, during the next few minutes, from stopping to listen again, and he had thus no time to analyze the feeling—half relief, half dread—which had rushed upon him as this idea suggested itself to his mind.

If relief had been uppermost it was soon disappointed for, no sooner had he succeeded in reducing his charge once more to a state of control, than he perceived the pillawer

himself emerging from the shade, mounted on the old pack-horse and leading the donkey.

Christophe stared. Such a sudden recovery was almost too wonderful to be believed. Surely the man who had wrought it could have been none other than a very celebrated doctor.

It is true, the pillawer looked very pale, his eye was wild, and there was a look of trembling nervousness about his whole person, as he rode out into the moonlight, glancing back hurriedly over his shoulder as he did so. This, however, was as nothing ; such an attack as he had had, was enough, thought Christophe, to upset the strongest nerves. Really the stranger had done wonders. But—where was he ?

Christophe took his eyes a moment from the advancing pillawer, and, like him, gazed also towards the wood ; but he could see no one.

Matelinn started violently as he came up with the lad, as though he had not yet perceived him, and had forgotten that he was present.

He stopped his horse, reflected a moment, and then said hurriedly, “Christophe, my son, is that thou ?”

“Yes,” answered the lad in growing astonishment,—“You are then better ? The gentleman——”

“Yes, yes,” struck in the pillawer, interrupting him hastily,—“Yes, yes, much better—I—that is he—he bled me, you see ; and—and—it has nearly restored me. Thanks——”

He did not go on with his pious ejaculation ; it seemed to stick in his throat.

“Come,” he added, presently,—“let us be going.”

He kicked old Loizik with his heels, and the pack-horse went slowly on.

“But the gentleman,” said Christophe, “Where is he ? I have his horse, I can’t go till he comes.”

The pillawer drew rein again, glanced over his shoulder, seemed to reflect once more, and then said :

“Yes, you can wait if you like. He bled me, you see, as I told you, and then—then he went away to get some remedies, down the cart-track yonder—he said there was a short cut. He said, though, that if I felt better meantime, I’d best move on ; it was cold you see, and the spasms—In short I mustn’t stop; it’s—it’s as much as my life is worth. No, not that; I didn’t quite mean that. There, I’m going; you can do as you like. He won’t be long, I daresay; and if he is—Let me see, what did he say? Oh, that you might shut the gate, ride the horse a mile or so down the road, and then turn him loose, he knows his way home—these pampered brutes all do. *Mille tonnaires*, lad! keep the beast off me, can’t you?” he cried in a shrill voice, as the grey suddenly kicked up its heels perilously near to Loizik’s head,—“Would you be the death of your own father?—*Your own father*, mind; never forget that, whatever may happen. Well, you know where to follow me. Mind, shut the gate!”

The pillawer called this last sentence over his shoulder, as he rode through, and turned down the main road, followed by the donkey.

Christophe was left behind with the fiery grey, which had become so restive again that he utterly refused to stand, and the lad had to keep him in constant motion, up and down, up and down the snowy path, till time and space seemed interminable, and body and mind were alike weary; the one with unceasing exertion, the other from puzzling over the strange events of this strange evening.

What was the meaning of the pillawer's strange words? what of his still more wonderful recovery? and what had become of the stranger all this time?—was he *never* coming back?

Christophe looked again for the twentieth time to where the cart-road vanished from sight among the gloom of the fir-trees; but nothing was to be seen, nothing but the trees themselves, and their shadows, which now began to move a little, as a light breeze rose, and gently stirred the branches. This movement, the utter loneliness, and long watching, awoke a nervous feeling in the bosom of the lad. The shadows seemed to take strange forms, and he started two or three times, thinking that something was coming to him down the path. A nameless terror, as at an unseen presence in the wood, took possession of him, and yet he could not resolve to leave his charge. Hush, what was that? Did someone sigh, or was it only the wind?

With heart beating in great throbs, Christophe led the grey close up to the margin of the wood. Again a sound broke the stillness, a sound which was not the wind. It seemed like a hollow groan rising out of the shadows which shaded the base of the old menhir.

Superstition is strong in the Celtic race, strongest of all, perhaps, in that portion of it which inhabits the more remote parts of Brittany. The peculiar circumstances attending his birth and breeding, as well as the congenial soil of his individual character, had given it a hold on the Child of the Menhir, more tenacious even than on most of his countrymen.

For some moments he felt convinced that he had just had an interview with the devil himself, who, encouraged by the unfilial feelings he was conscious of having cherished, had assumed the form of the pillawer to tempt him away from his duty. Yes, it must be so ; Matelinn Gourven still lay groaning in the hollow, and in a few moments more he might have left him to perish.

But the horse—the stranger ? For an instant everything began to assume a semblance of unreality, and, but for a very material bite in the arm, which the Normandy horse, conscious of the loosened rein, suddenly turned to inflict, Christophe might have ended by persuading himself that the steed he held was nothing but a spectre.

This, however, proved a salutary check to his nervous fancies ; and he determined, come what would, to try and

tether the animal to the nearest tree, and go down into the hollow to learn the worst.

Binding the grey as firmly as circumstances would allow, the lad crossed himself, murmured an *Ave*, and, mastering his nervousness as best he could, descended to the spot where the pillawer had lain. There was nothing there.

The lad skirted the giant stone with slow, cautious steps, stooping to examine the ground as he went. The moon had shifted her position a little in the interval, but there was still sufficient light at the bottom of the hollow to reveal most of its surface to a close observer. There were footprints in several places ; at one, the snow had been a good deal trampled ; but still Christophe could see no living object ; the ancient monument seemed to be the sole occupant of the spot.

The boy had nearly finished his inspection, and was about to turn away, when, where the shades fell thickest, his foot struck against something soft, and again came the sighing groan—this time close to his ear.

Christophe started back ; a cold dew broke out on his brow, and his heart seemed to stop, and then go on again with suffocating rapidity.

“Saint Corneille, be my succour !” he murmured,—“What is this ? *Can it be he ?*”

Controlling himself with a great effort, he bent more closely over the object on the ground, and could just

make out the outline of a human body ; the light was too dim to distinguish anything further.

The lad's first impulse was to drag it out into the more illumined part of the hollow and satisfy himself at once whether it were the pillawer or not ; to his excited imagination, the uncertainty involved too much ghastly horror to allow of his enduring it for a moment more. Following this impulse, he put his hands under the arms of the body, and, in another instant had placed it where a dim moonbeam, filtering through the dark branches, fell full on the upturned face. It was not the pillawer.

Those clearly-cut, high-bred features never belonged to a rag-merchant. At the first glance Christophe recognised the owner of the grey.

There are moments in the lives of some into which the bitterness of years seems to be compressed. Misery, such as, perhaps, does not come to one man in the whole of his three-score years and ten, is meted to another in a second of time, falling upon his head with a weight which crushes out youth while it is yet tender, blasting the green shoots of life with the suddenness of scathing lightning. Moments there are which suffice to poison the sources of life so that the stream of after years may never flow bright again ; which blight all chances of happiness, leaving the whole nature warped and riven well-nigh hopelessly. Faith forbids us to omit that saving “well-nigh.” God be thanked, some *do* overcome these

earthquake shocks, especially when the cause lies in the fault of another rather than in themselves ; but where one is victorious, a score are vanquished. Shall we judge them—we who have been spared the ordeal? God help them! He only knows the trial, He only can be their judge.

Such a moment it was that came to *Hamlet* when the lips of one no longer among the living, revealed to him the secret which was to burden his whole life ; “wiping off all trivial, fond records” from memory’s table, to make room for one single black inscription.

Such a moment came now to Christophe, the Child of the Menhir.

It hardly needed the wound in the breast, from which dark drops of blood oozed slowly, to show that there had been foul play ; it hardly needed a backward thought over the events of the evening to show whose hand had dealt the blow. That instant revealed it all, past all doubt.

Not that the lad could realize all the horror contained in this truth at the moment when his eyes first fell upon the face of the murdered man. The shock of the sudden discovery was too great to allow his mind full play ; and the hope, soon to fade on nearer inspection, that the wound might not be unto death, was still there. Outward things, connected with the victim of this awful crime, must still occupy him, drawing him, as it were, out of himself by their urgent importunity, as he stood there,

holding the wounded man and watching his fast-fleeting breath ; but the dull agony of consciousness, not yet felt out—the horror, which as yet there was no leisure to face—underlaid them all.

Presently the half-closed eyes opened, and Christophe felt them turn on him with a look of keen reproach.

There was an effort to speak, an awful, gasping effort, which ended, not in words, but in a rush of blood from the pale lips ; then the head fell back, and all was over.

Christophe laid the body down, and as he drew out the hands which had supported it, a strange sensation about them made him hold them up to the moonlight.

They were wet with blood.

This only was needed to make the lurking horror break loose. The lad shuddered like one in an ague-fit, uttered a piercing cry, and fled from the hollow.

As he gained the higher ground, a dark object rushed snorting before him, sprang through the gate, and disappeared down the road, with the fleetness of the wind. It was the grey Normandy horse, which, alarmed by the cry, had broken his bridle and escaped.

Christophe followed him ; but, by a strange impulse which he could not have explained, he paused at the gate, shut it carefully, and then rushed on again as though pursued by the terrors of a Cain.

CHAPTER VII.

A DARK HOUR.

“ My heart turned sick, my brain grew sore,
And throbbed awhile, then beat no more :
The skies spun like a mighty wheel ;
I saw the trees like drunkards reel,
And a slight flash sprang o'er my eyes,
Which saw no further : he who dies
Can die no more than then I died.”

BYRON—“ *Mazeppa.*”

How long he continued to fly, Christophe never knew. The unreasoning terror that was upon him took away all consciousness of time and space.

To put as much distance as possible between himself and the horrors of the menhir was the idea uppermost in his mind, if idea it could be called ; and it drove him on and on through the night, with a tyranny not to be resisted.

Men have lost their wits from a shock less than that which Christophe had sustained ; and, for the time at least, the lad’s mind was off its balance.

His mad flight was ended by his foot striking against a stone, or some other hard object, and he was thrown violently to the ground, striking his head as he fell.

For a long time he lay there insensible, then cold or

pain, or a mixture of both, brought back a degree of consciousness, and he sat up and looked around.

It was still moonlight, no sign of dawn had yet appeared in the east; surely winter night had never been so long.

The lad rose slowly and painfully. His limbs were numb with cold; his head ached in dull heavy throbs. He felt very weary, yet, almost mechanically he began to walk forward, for the sense of flight was still upon him.

On and on he went, scarcely more than half conscious all the while, till at last a time arrived when rest became absolutely necessary; without it he could go no further.

The instinctive pause roused him a little. He looked around. The day was dawning at last. The cold light of a winter's morning was spreading over the eastern sky, and the moon was fading before it. The road had left the fir plantations, and led, bleak and solitary, over a barren moor. A few paces from where the lad was standing was a place where four ways met, and marking it, as is often the case in Brittany, was an ancient stone cross with a Figure of the Crucified fastened against it.

Tall and dark it stood out across the pale dawn, the only notable object within sight, its awful burden hanging silent and motionless between earth and heaven, with head bowed towards the one and arms outstretched against the other.

The lad started as his eyes fell on the way-side crucifix ; he crossed himself instinctively, moved forward and kneeled down on the well-worn steps.

The habit of a life-time, not any idea of relief in prayer, made him do this, and from habit also he raised his eyes to the sacred Figure, and his lips began to murmur the *Pater noster*.

But scarcely had the holy name of Father risen to them, than an uncontrollable shudder passed over the lad's whole frame, and the words died away unuttered. He *could* not say them, the bare idea seemed sacrilege.

Father ! what then was his father ?—a murderer ; and he was—a murderer's son ! Nay, worse !—the lad grew sick as this new idea forced itself into prominence—a partner in the deed ! Yes, so it seemed to his diseased imagination ; for had he not lured the victim to his death ? Was it not he who had waited for the prey, and conjured him in the name of all that was most holy to take the step which led him into what was surely the foulest snare ever laid by one man for another : a trap baited by pity, by a feeling of brotherly-kindness ?

Oh, cruel, cruel to do this ; doubly cruel when it was a father who thus made a son the unconscious instrument of his foul purpose.

Christophe groaned aloud, as these details in all their horror passed in review before him ; and, as he knelt with eyes fixed mechanically upon the Face above him, the

sacred countenance itself seemed to take the features of the murdered man and look down reproachfully upon him.

It was too much. With hands pressed over his eyes to shut out all sight, with thumbs thrust into his ears to exclude what, after all, was no external sound, the echo of the terrible death-rattle, Christophe turned once more and stumbled blindly across the heath. A few yards he went, not knowing whither, hardly conscious but of the horror which possessed him ; then even that consciousness fled away. There came a sound as of rushing waters in his closed ears, hot flashes of black and crimson before his closed eyes, a sensation as of endless falling, and then he knew no more.

BOOK III.

The Outcast.

A CHILD OF THE MENHIR.

BOOK III.—THE OUTCAST.

CHAPTER I.

POORER THAN POOR.

“ Le laboureur et sa femme se remettent à suer et à souffrir, car ils sont seuls encore. Le laboureur et sa femme sont comme des hirondelles qui vont faire leurs nids aux fenêtres des villes ; chaque joor on les balaye, et chaque il leur faut recommencer.

O laboureurs ! vous menez une vie dure dans le monde.”

—*Complainte du Laboureur* (Breton).

CLICKETY-CLICK—*clickety-click—clickety-click*—this sound, repeated monotonously *ad infinitum*, mingled itself confusedly with the slowly returning consciousness of the lad Christophe.

First came a sense of pain, as though the sharp, regular noises were so many pins, inserted one after the other with painful precision into the dull, bruised substance which used to be his brain. Then, as life ebbed slowly back, he was just conscious of a languid feeling of curiosity as to the cause, a feeling not strong enough yet to act sufficiently on the will which should

make the heavy eye-lids open, and so take in what was going on.

Presently, while this sluggish inertia still continued, the clicking sound ceased suddenly, and then he found that it had been underlaid by another and fainter sound, which still went on incessantly—the *whirr, whirr*—as of some one winding thread.

Then low voices mingled with this—the hoarse whisper of a man, the thin whisper of a woman.

“He’s long, wife,” said the first.

“Ay, maybe he’ll be longer yet,” said the second.

“It’s likely thou wert right, after all,” said the first.

“Ay; thou mostlys comest round to *my* way o’ thinking, good man,” said the second.

“Won’t get over it?—Better have let him die?” asked the first.

“That’s about it, husband,” returned the second.

Then there was silence again, but for the *whirr, whirr* of the thread, or what sounded like it. Presently the man resumed:—

“I hadn’t the heart to leave him, wife; a Christian can’t see his brother in such a strait and not help. Who can tell, wife, it may bring a blessing on us, on thee and me—we want it badly!”

“Ay. And don’t think it’s because I grudge him aught. It’s not that; only—” she sighed, and if more words followed, they did not reach Christophe’s ears, for the

clicking sound began again. Somehow, this time, its very monotony proved lulling, for soon he ceased to hear it, and consciousness was once more a blank.

Next time he awoke, it was with a start ; something had fallen with a sharp sound.

“Broken again !” exclaimed the same man’s voice he had heard before, only this time it had forgotton to whisper,—“The poor old frame is getting rotten Barbaïk !”

“Ay,” said the woman, “but it’ll last out our time, my friend.”

“Our time ! Ah, wife, wife, don’t strike out hope like that, so calmly, so—It *will* come, fortune *will* come before thou and I have lived out our time ; and then,—and then we can have new frames. It’ll not *need* to last out our time, I say ; perhaps a year, perhaps—— There, I’ve tied it up once more, and it’ll go for the present, anyhow.”

The hoarse, eager tone in which these last words were spoken ceased ; and again the *clickety-click*, *clickety-click*, which had been intermitted for some minutes, began again.

Then, at last, by a great effort, Christophe exerted his will, and opened the lids which hung so heavily over his eyes.

He need not have hesitated so long ; there was nothing to be afraid of in the sight which met them, nothing unusual—nothing glaring or dazzling. It was simply a scene which may be met with any day in Brittany—a

cottage interior of the humblest class: a place where poverty was evidently too much at home, where she abode rather as an inmate than as a guest.

The roof, which was the first thing that offered itself to Christophe's gaze, was dark brown in tint, crossed by mouldering wood rafters, smoke-dried and rain-soaked, between which showed the rough heather thatching; here, bulging in, as though it would fall into the room; there, falling out, leaving tiny chinks through which the blue sky peeped, as with laughing eyes, whose sunny beams broke in and twinkled on the earthern floor below.

The walls also were dark brown, and were evidently formed of rough stone, smeared with clay of a sombre hue, stained here and there with leprous spots of damp and mildew.

Opposite the rude bed on which he lay, Christophe could see an open fire-place, on whose hearth smouldered a few turfs, the pungent smoke from which seemed unwilling to escape by the proper opening, and preferred seeking a passage through the chinks of the roof, and through the ill-fitting door, below which a wintry wind was blowing a tiny white snow-wreath into the room. To the right of this was a tiny window, cracked, straw-stuffed, paper-mended, yet framing at that moment a picture which none of its defects could wholly mar—a splendid sun-set sky, rich, beyond the skill of any painter, save the One who is Divine, in glorious tints of deep-dyed crimson, palest

gold, and green, so ethereal as to border on blue; and, rolling up to this, in snowy waves, intense with reflected colour, a great, wide stretch of moorland, infinitely melancholy, solitary as the sea.

The solemn, rose-tinted light, dim and grave as that which filters through the saint-filled window of some old Cathedral, fell even into that poverty-stricken room, glorifying everything within it with the last smile of the dying giant, who had worthily run his course and was content to pass hence in tranquil peace. There was little indeed for it to fall upon, and that little, but for the all-glorifying light, would have seemed mean and sordid enough. Even the Crucifix, which hung in a niche of the wall, facing the window, was of the roughest, coarsest manufacture, and the *bénitier* and rosary suspended below, could not have cost more than a few *centimes* at a village Pardon.

Yet in the rich, dim light of the dying west, which fell upon it through the dusty window opposite, the sacred Countenance seemed to wear an unearthly smile. Calm still, victorious over death, it recalled no memory to the lad's yet half-numb senses of the terrible look which had been the finishing-stroke to his despair.

So far, indeed, was it from recalling anything to his mind, that his eyes soon wandered elsewhere, languidly taking in the details which surrounded him.

Of other furniture, besides the bed on which he lay, the

Crucifix, and a rude bench by the fire, there appeared to be little or none, and yet the room was almost filled; for two great, cumbrous hand-looms stood, one in a broken condition against the wall by the bed, the other under the window. By the latter sat a man, working with his feet the rickety treddles, while his hands threw the shuttle backwards and forwards. He was pale and emaciated to an appalling degree; his spine curved outwards from constant bending over the loom; his chest was hollow; his cheeks, sunken and pallid, contrasted painfully with the black-browed eyes, deep-set in cave-like sockets, and the dark, lank masses of hair which fell on to his shoulders. The hands which threw the shuttle were blanched to an unhealthy palor, and almost devoid of flesh; and the fingers were worn at the ends to a thin, sharp hook, almost like the claws of a bird. They looked as though, ever since they had been fingers, they had never done anything else but throw the shuttle and manipulate the linen threads of the growing web. The weaver seemed as much of a machine as the frame at which he worked, and no less worn out and rickety.

Opposite the man, at the lower end of the loom, stood a diminutive woman, filling the winder with coarse linen thread. She, also, had a pallid, half-fed appearance, but there was that in the expression of her pale, pinched face which was lacking to the man, making even his wasted features infinitely less uncomely. Sharp, hungry,

grasping worldly-wisdom sat on the woman's countenance, while on the man's one could read nothing but the pathetic patience of a weak dreamer, who is content to go on plodding wearily at an ungrateful task, sustained by the vision of coming fortune, which, like the lapwing, keeps ever flitting before him and leading him on with deceitful hopes.

The Breton hand-loom weaver doggedly refuses to realize that machinery has dealt the death-blow to his once flourishing trade. Year by year his earnings become more scanty, his condition more miserable ; yet, in spite of all, he remains obstinate in his belief that this depression is but for a time ; that a day will come when all the old prosperity will return fourfold to him who knows how to wait. Never was a land more conservative than Brittany. Old customs, old beliefs, old ways die hard there, disputing with relentless Progress each inch of the legendary soil, so dearly loved, so tenaciously clung to.

Presently the sunlight faded wholly from the west, leaving the little room in dim grey twilight. Up to the last moment at which it was possible to distinguish the warp from the woof, did the weaver continue his task ; and when he could see no more he leant back in his seat, joined his hands over his eyes, and stretching out his tired arms, gave vent to a long, deep sigh. Then the woman also dropped her winder and sank down wearily on the bench by the fire.

For some moments they sat thus, and complete silence reigned in the little room ; then the woman got up slowly, stirred up the smouldering embers, laid upon them some faggots of wood, and began to prepare the scanty *pot au feu* of water, buckwheat bread, and onions, for supper. As the flame leaped up, kindled the wood, and flickered through the room, the man also rose, shuffled his feet into his wooden shoes, and moved heavily across the earthen floor, till he stood by the bed on which lay the sick lad. Bending down, he set himself to scan Christophe's face so attentively, that the lad, who had again fallen into a sort of doze, opened his eyes with a start.

“He lives, Barbaïk—he lives !” exclaimed the weaver, with excitement.

“Sainte-Anne d'Auray ! I scarcely expected it. Dost hear, wife ?” he continued, turning to the woman who was paying no attention, but continued to prepare the *pot au feu* in silence.

“Dost hear ? He lives, I tell thee !”

Barbaïk was standing with her back turned, shredding onions into the black pot, which was beginning to simmer on the fire.

“Hum,” she said, “hum ; then for the next few days, I suppose, there'll be another mouth for the *pot au feu*. How am I to make that enough for three, which is short commons for two ? I ask thee that, Grallon ?”

The weaver did not answer ; but he sighed, and

straightening himself, glanced towards the Crucifix. The glance seemed to do him good, for his melancholy face brightened, and he said, quite cheerily, "Never mind, wife, I'll do with half my portion. He'll bring a blessing on us ; see if he doesn't."

Saying which, Grallon again bent over the bed.

"Art better, lad?" he asked, softly.

It was an effort to Christophe to take in the sense, even of this simple question, still more to answer it. For a moment his great dark eyes stared helplessly at his questioner, and when the words did come, they seemed to him as though sounding loudly from a long way off. To the weaver, on the contrary, they sounded only as a hoarse whisper, which he had to bend down quite close to catch.

"Was I ill?"

It is disconcerting to have one question capped by another, instead of receiving the answer you are expecting.

The weaver hesitated.

"Ill?" he repeated, presently, in a puzzled tone. "Ill? Don't you know, then? don't you remember you fell into the *Poulpikan's** Hollow on the moor out there, and I found you lying, head down, heels up, between two big stones, with all the breath knocked out of you? Ill! Dost hear, wife? he asks if he were ill!"

"Come to supper, Grallon," was all the reply vouchsafed

by Barbaïk ; and Grallon, convinced apparently that nothing was to be made of his guest at present, and that he would certainly not need the half portion that evening, complied.

CHAPTER II.

A TERRIBLE RUMOUR.

“This night, a rumour wildly blown about,
Came—”

TENNYSON.—“*Guinevere.*”

WAS the lad an innocent?

Grallon and his wife, Barbaïk, had several discussions on this question in the course of the next two days following that on which Christophe had been found by the weaver in the Pouplikan’s Hollow. It furnished food for the mind of the poor toiler, as he plied his monotonous trade at the noisy hand-loom; and his wife, perhaps, thought of it also rather anxiously, as she wound the thread for her husband, casting glances the while at their silent guest, and wondering how they should get quit of this extra mouth, should it prove to belong to a witless head.

Thus in the pauses of work, when the eternal *clickety-click* ceased for a moment, the weaver would unfold in a cautious voice the result of his thoughts since the last debate, and Barbaïk would listen, and then put in the same shrewd and caustic remarks, which served to provide a fresh train for speculation during the next spell of weaving.

Meanwhile the object of this interest lay silent on the

hard bed which the poor couple had vacated for him ; or, as was the case during the course of the second day, sat silent by the fire, whither the good-wife had assisted him to move.

He paid little attention to what was going on around him ; he did not even seem to hear the low-toned discussions, discreetly carried on by signs and whispers, accompanied by various glances towards their subject, lest more intelligence might be there than was suspected.

The fact was that there had been sufficient injury to Christophe's head, both from the shock he had received during that terrible night, and from the effects of his fall, to produce a dulled, stunned condition of the brain ; which, though it no longer amounted to insensibility, and was gradually wearing away with every hour, he could not exert himself sufficiently to shake off.

Could not, and perhaps, also, would not.

For it was with him as with one who awakes from sleep with the dim consciousness of a terrible misfortune ; the full knowledge and consequent anguish of which are lurking in the background, ready to spring upon him when he shall have fully awakened. Can we wonder if such a one cling as long as may be to the merciful insensibility of sleep ? Does not each of us who has gone through such experience give way to the weakness ?

Let no one, therefore, marvel at the condition of the Breton lad.

This state of things lasted till the afternoon of the fourth day after the murder by the menhir of Saint-Samson.

It was market day in Dinan, the nearest town, which, however, lay far enough away from the weaver's lonely cottage ; and Barbaïk had gone to sell some of her husband's manufacture, and lay in a supply of necessaries with the produce.

Not having his wife to talk to, Grallon had worked with hardly a pause during the whole time which had elapsed since her departure ; and Christophe, at whose toilet she had had no time to assist, had remained in bed, sunk in his usual condition of semi-lethargy, only rousing sufficiently to swallow the portion of thin bread-soup which the weaver brought him at noon.

As the short winter's day drew to its close, footsteps were heard outside the door, and the wife returned, laden with her purchases and prime ! with a supply of market gossip which would afford the solitary couple a staple of conversation for many days to come.

The generally rather silent woman was unusually excited, and evidently brimming over with news. “ Well, Grallon, well,” she said, depositing her basket and bundles on the floor by her husband's frame—“ Here's doings for a Christian land ! No Christian will feel safe in his bed if the rascal be allowed to escape. Sainte-Anne d'Auray be our succour ! It is terrible ! terrible !”

Grallon had stopped his work on his wife's entrance, and was leaning on his frame, listening, open-mouthed.

"But what is terrible, my friend? What, then, is it that has happened?"

"Happened? Yes, plenty has happened; and to think we should never have heard, and it is four days since. *Four days*—figure it to yourself, my friend! It is terrible to live in such ignorance."

"But Barbaïk, for the love of Heaven, tell me what has happened?"

She came quite close to the frame, put her hands on her sides, assumed an air of solemn importance, and then said, in a tragic whisper:

"It is Monsieur le Comte; poor gentleman, he is dead!"

"Dead!"

"Ay, dead!"

"But how? Ah, well, he looked healthy enough last time I saw him, and as hard as Saint-Samson himself. Not a sou of rent would he let us off, though he knew that times were bad. Ah, well, the healthiest and the hardest have to go, seigneur as well as peasant, and there's a day of reckoning for us all. Yes—"

But here the weaver's wife cut him short impatiently. She had heard all that before, and it vexed her that her husband should serve up his insipid *réchauffé*, while her news was fresh, and highly spiced above all that had fallen to her share for long.

“Great-mouth!” she exclaimed, stamping her foot on the earthen floor, “Wait, then, till thou hast heard! Dost thou think I should make so much of it if M. le Comte had died in his bed? Bah, that is a thing of every day! No, no; this is *quite* another affair.”

She paused a moment to enjoy the impression she had made, and further whet his unworthy curiosity, and this time she was rewarded.

The weaver started to his feet.

“What?” he said, “what? Not in his bed! Barbaïk, thou dost not mean to say that M. le Comte was——”

“Murdered!” said his wife, supplying the word in an impressive tone.

“Ay, murdered! That’s it, Grallon.”

“But how?”

“How? Well, that’s just the question. He was found lying dead, stabbed in several places; but who did it, no one knows; the rascal has escaped.”

“Good heavens! and to think it has come to that! Hard as Saint-Samson he was, there is no denying it, but——”

“Saint-Samson!” echoed the weaver’s wife, again taking the words out of her husband’s mouth,——

“Yes, that’s just where it was. He was lying by the menhir, poor gentleman, dead as a door-nail. Thou seest, my friend, it was thus: He had been away on business, and Madame la Comtesse was expecting him back that

very night. He rode alone, as he was fond of doing, though folks say he had a considerable sum upon him, which was not there when he was found. That tempted the rascal, doubtless. Well, he never came home alive—never! His horse was all the living being that ever arrived that night. They thought at first he had thrown his rider, and search was made, and after awhile he was found; but it was not the horse, poor innocent animal; no, no."

"But who was it, then? Who?"

"Who? Inbecile that thou art! Haven't I said that is just the question?"

"But it is terrible! Barbaïk, wife, it has made me feel quite restless. Suppose I run down to the public-house at the Quatres Maisons, and see if they have heard anything there?"

"Ay, do. And I will step across the heath to Mère Nanon's, and tell her the news. I say, Grallon,"—she lowered her voice and glanced towards the bed—

"There is a reward out for the rascal who did it."

The weaver pricked up his ears.

"A reward? How much?"

"Nay, that I could not certainly learn. Some said fifty *louis*, some a hundred."

"Holy Saint-Corentin! a hundred *louis*! If we could gain it, wife! Tell me, could it possibly be—" he jerked his thumb towards the bed, instead of finishing his sentence.

“ Bah ! a mere lad—an innocent to all appearance. And yet—” She too whispered the rest.

“ Yes, certainly, my wife ; yes, I could swear there was blood on his hands when I found him. But then he had fallen. No, it seems unlikely. But come, if he it be, he is safe enough for the present. Let us go and see if we can learn some more.”

“ Ay, and don’t stop down at the inn, Grallon, my friend. Remember cider costs money and thou hast none.”

“ A hundred louis, a hundred louis,” murmured the weaver reflectively, for once in a way paying small attention to his wife’s words,—

“ Well, didn’t I *say* he might bring us a blessing ?”

“ The saints send it—may be so,” retorted Barbaïk, incredulously,—

“ But the louis are not yet there, so beware of the cider. Adieu, my friend, *à bientôt !*”

So saying, the couple quitted the cottage, one going in this direction, the other in that, across the sunset-lighted heath.

CHAPTER III.

HAUNTED AND HUNTED.

“ Half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
In a bad dream, perhaps.”

R. BROWNING—“ *Childe Roland*.”

FOR some moments after they were gone, the cottage was silent, but for the tinkling sound of the low fire. Presently, however, there was a rustle in the far corner where stood the bed, and anyone who had looked in might have seen its occupant raise himself on his elbow and look round. There was a wild expression in his grey eyes, such as one sees in those of a hunted animal, who has escaped for a time, only to hear again the sounds of pursuit. The dull lethargic look was gone, and yet it was plain that reason was not yet fully awakened.

It would be hard to say how much of the foregoing conversation the lad had heard, what were the words that had first roused his attention, and to what extent the whole had been understood. However that might be, certain it is that, to a certain point, the dormant faculties had been stirred up and fear was alive again.

Fear was the dominant motive power at that moment

and it acted at once, lending fictitious strength to the weakened body.

After satisfying himself that he was, indeed, alone, Christophe rose from his bed, dressed himself hastily, and, opening the door, left the cottage.

The sun was near its setting, and was throwing long, level rays over the moor. The snow no longer lay in unbroken whiteness. A partial thaw had carried most of it away, and the spotted heath looked inexpressibly dreary.

The lad paused a moment on the threshold and looked around. He could see by the marks of their feet in the patches of snow which still remained, what direction had been taken by the weaver and his wife ; and he, therefore, struck off in a contrary course to either. There was no path, and he plunged at random straight ahead, through snow, through pools of water, shining redly in the setting sun, through brown masses of wet heather.

The crimson globe which hung in the south-west sank lower, and dipped below the far horizon. Light died from the heath, and then from the pale sky overhead ; but still Christophe stumbled blindly on, every now and then casting anxious glances over his shoulder, as though he dreaded pursuit. It never seemed to strike him that there were other dangers ; that he might fall again into some hollow, or sink up to his neck in the marshy ground through which he had, every now and then, to struggle.

There is a saying that a special Providence watches over children, and those whose reason is not in a condition for them to watch over their own safety. Such care was there, I think, for Christophe then, or surely his feet would never have been kept from the many pit-falls which lay around in the gathering darkness.

Suddenly, it was too dark to see how, he again found his feet on hard, dry, level ground. It seemed as if he had struck some road, and so it must have been, for, as he went on, the nature of the ground did not alter.

Walking more easily, he began to discover what a strain there had hitherto been upon him, and how his enfeebled limbs were trembling after their late exertions. He stopped for a moment, drew a long breath, and glanced up at the sky. It was getting a little lighter there. Stars were looking out, the sunset clouds had melted away, and against the vague expanse of firmament two long lines of shadowy plumes, dark and tall as those which fancy might picture as waving from a giant's funeral-car, stood out on either hand. They were poplars, he knew that ; such poplars as you see every day in France, keeping watch, like tall sentinels, over the high road ; and yet there was something in their aspect which made him shudder involuntarily. He looked down again and trudged on, striving in vain against the dull feeling of lassitude, which each moment kept hanging in heavier weight about his limbs.

The air was cold and raw, he shivered as he walked, and his teeth began to chatter like a pair of castanets. Presently came the feeling, rather than the thought, that he was coming to the end of his powers, that to go on much longer would be to fall down exhausted; and what would be the result of that in his enfeebled state during a mid-winter night? Christophe did not ask himself this question; he was in no condition to do so. It was the instinct of self-preservation, more than any conscious reasoning, which led him to look from side to side to see if shelter there were any, of which such an outcast as he might venture to avail himself.

Poplars, poplars, never-ending poplars; nothing but these and his own weary body seemed to Christophe to remain upon earth. Look where he might, nothing else was to be seen.

Presently, stumbling wearily on, he came to a break in the dark avenue, where two side ways, one to the right, the other to the left, turned off from the main road. More to escape from the poplars than for any other reason, Christophe took that to the left, and, after following it for some minutes, perceived something which was not a poplar, looming from the twilight in a field on one side.

Could it be a building? It looked like one. Christophe stopped and gazed at it wistfully. His need of rest and shelter was sore; and yet he dreaded his fellow-men with the haunting fear of Cain. He felt, as it were, a brand

upon him, by which everyone beholding must recognise him as connected with the dreadful deed by the menhir of Saint-Samson.

But as he stood there hesitating, his powers failed more and more, and bodily need prevailed.

Scarcely knowing what he did, the lad passed through a gap in the fence, staggered across the intervening ground, and fell, half-fainting, against the wall of a small building. It took him some moments to collect himself sufficiently to search for a door, and several more for his trembling fingers to lift the latch ; but when that was done, a sense of great relief stole over him, for the place within was shrouded in the sheltering darkness he had grown to love. With a great sigh of mingled weariness and relief, he went in, drew the door after him and sank down on a heap of something which felt soft and dry. The place was warm with the breath of animals.

A sleepy bleat sounded from some far-away corner as the lad entered, followed by the regular *munch munch* of some creature chewing the cud, after which all was silent. I question if the weary boy heard even these. Nature could do no more. He had reached shelter just in time.

CHAPTER IV.

TIRED OUT.

"O'erspent with the day's fatigue."

LONGFELLOW.—"The Golden Legend."

ALL next day till nightfall no one came near the shed, and the weary lad slept without a break; but when the sun had once more run his course and was sinking to his rest, the door of the stable opened and a little peasant girl, of about ten years old, entered, with her arms full of fodder for the young animals which were kept there. She gave a cry on seeing the sleeping figure stretched on the litter by the door, with one arm under his haggard cheek and the other thrown out at full length.

The cry startled Christophe; he awoke, sat up, supporting himself on his elbow, and then the two stared at each other in about equal alarm.

The boy was the first to recover himself. He got up, shook the litter from his clothes, and said, with the natural politeness of his race:

"Pardon, I was so tired, I thought I might come in and rest."

"Yes, certainly," returned the little damsel, recovering

herself with alacrity, now that she heard the intruder speak,—

“But don’t you want to stay? You can’t have been here long, you know; its only just sunset.”

Did he know? Christophe asked himself the question in a puzzled way. Surely the sun had set long since when he lay down, and surely he had not just come, as the little maiden so confidently declared.

“Yes,” he said—“Yes, I will stay till morning if you will let me; that is, if it be already so late?” he added, looking in a puzzled way at the little white-capped figure standing in the stream of red sunlight which had entered with her by the door.

“Yes, it is late,” she repeated, decidedly,—

“It is already four o’clock, and time to feed the goat, and the heifer, and the dear little red ox. Don’t you see how hungry they are? Listen how they call me! Coming, coming, little darlings; Marie won’t let you starve, will she?”

Speaking thus in a soothing tone of caress, the child went up to the animals and served out their daily fodder, portioning to each his due share with scrupulous impartiality.

“See how hungry they are!” she repeated, holding out her empty hands towards Christophe, who had again subsided on to his heap,—

“They know it is sunset well enough; they always know,

and so do I. I'm going home to supper now," she continued, coming away from the animals and moving towards the door. There, as though struck with a sudden thought, she paused, looked at Christophe for a moment, and then said: "I'm hungry, that's how I know it's supper time. Aren't *you* hungry, boy?"

Was he hungry?

Again the child's words had suggested a question, and this time Christophe did not have to search for an answer.

"Yes," he said, after an almost imperceptible pause. "I am *very* hungry."

"And have you nothing to eat?"

"No."

"Poor boy!"

Again the child paused, standing there, holding the door in her hand, and looking down on the lad with a pucker on her brow.

"Look here," she said presently, as though struck by a happy thought—

"You mustn't starve any more than the little animals. I'll run home and ask mother to give me something for you to eat."

Christophe looked alarmed.

"No, don't do that," he said,—

"She might send me away if she knew I were here. I—that is, I'm not so *very* hungry; I can do quite well till to-morrow."

The child felt in her pocket, and immediately her face brightened.

“ See,” she said, drawing out a piece of black bread. “ Here’s what mother gave me to eat when I was minding the cow. Now I know why I’m so particularly hungry this evening—I quite forgot my dinner !”

She put the bread into Christophe’s hand, and, with a friendly nod, and a brisk “ good-night,” shut the door, and was gone.

Not till the bread was between his teeth did the homeless lad know how much he had wanted it. Hard and dry as it was, he ate it to the last crumb, and would fain there had been more. Yet it did for his body that which his speech with the child had done for his mind. Of words, as of crumbs, there had been few, it is true ; yet both were wholesome and supplied a want of nature ; and, as he turned once more to sleep, feeling comforted, he knew not how, it did not even cross his mind, that, for the first time since that horrible night, he had exchanged reasonable words with a human being, and that she had not turned from him with horror.

He forgot for a moment his haunting consciousness of the brand of Cain, and in that sweet forgetfulness he fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

“THE HUSKS THAT THE SWINE DID EAT.”

—“An open mouth,
A gross need, food to fill us, and no more.”

E. R. BROWNING—“*Aurora Leigh*.”

CHRISTOPHE could never give any very coherent account of the manner in which he spent the next few days. That he left the stable very early the following morning, and that he remained on the tramp from dawn to dark, avoiding towns, and sleeping where he could, is about all that anyone has ever been able to glean from him.

How he lived during this time is also uncertain. One old woman remembers giving a lad, answering to his description, the scrapings of her *pot au feu*. A workman, going early to his labour, found him picking up the leavings of the fowls in a farm-yard. A child once shared her dinner with him. Little else, I think, can have passed his lips, if the next authentic account which has come down to us of the poor lad be not exaggerated.

Téphany Rannau, wife of Bénéad Rannau, owner of a tall windmill which stood in those days like a watch-tower overlooking the hollow in which nestles the old grey town of Morlaix, was standing one evening in the round door-

way of her husband's mill. Her arms were placed a-kimbo, her plump hands resting on her hips, her comely face was turned towards the sunset, and every now and then she whistled and called as though summoning some animals to come and partake of the contents of a smoking bucket which stood beside her.

To what species these animals belonged soon became apparent. A series of short grunts broke on the evening air, and then, with a lumbering scamper, a flock of gaunt-looking Brittany pigs appeared over a ridge of rising ground, and ran, helter-skelter, long ears flapping, tails twisting, little eyes greedily twinkling, up to the miller's wife. Not too nice were they to enjoy the sweepings of the round-house, which thrifty Téphany every evening collected and cooked for their supper; and soon every snout was in the bucket, and Madame Rannau was standing looking on, with a smile on her good-tempered face, at the good appetite of her gobbling pensioners.

She left them after a while, and went back into the mill for a handful of corn to throw to her pigeons, who, jealous of the pigs' good fortune, were fluttering round, trying in vain to find a vacant corner whence to snatch a beakful for themselves. Pretty creatures they looked, with their white wings, bright eyes, and dainty pink feet, cooing and flapping and flashing around the ugly swine in the low red sun-light; now soaring to a coign of vantage on the old grey mill, thence the better to survey possibilities; then

swooping almost on to the backs of the pigs, cooing lustily if a chance grain of pottage rewarded their efforts.

The moralising beholder would probably have seen here the emblems of innocence and sensuality ; and yet, from my knowledge of pigeon-nature, I much doubt whether the dainty white birds were a whit less greedy than the ill-conditioned swine. So much for a timid and innocent appearance ! It often gets more credit than it deserves from a skin-deep observer. Presently, however, timidity overcame greed. With a sudden rush and flutter, every white wing in the assembly struck the air, leaving the field in undisputed possession of the swine. Undisputed ? Hardly that.

Madame Rannau, who understood the character of her feathered favourites too well to suppose that they would have forsaken the ground without due cause while anything remained in the pigs’ bucket, looked up in astonishment at the sudden flight past the window, where she was standing with the corn-basket on her arm.

“Who can be coming ?” she asked herself, as she turned towards the door of the mill.

“ Ah, Minet ! if it should be thou who art frightening my pretty doves——”

The sentence remained unfinished on the red lips of the miller’s wife, for she had reached the door and come in full view of the intruder, who had dispersed not only the pigeons, but even the less bold among the porkers.

No cat was this strange, gaunt being, kneeling on both knees upon the ground and disputing with the two largest pigs for the remains of the pottage. His face was half buried in the bucket, his long, dark hair hung, lank and uncombed, upon his shoulders ; his back seemed a mass of rags, through which, here and there, peeped the naked skin. Two claw-like hands, thin to emaciation, greedily scraped the pottage from the sides of the bucket and raised it to a mouth which seemed unable to wait for the service of the hands, but was eagerly bent to meet them.

What was it ? A wild man, or a being left in the last extremities of starvation ?

'The blood left Téphany's ruddy lips ; they turned white as unripe cherries, and her kindly eyes grew round with terror as she looked at the spectacle before her.

- No wonder the pigeons were frightened.

For some moments Madame Rannau stood, as though rooted to the spot, then her fears found expression in a sharp cry.

The creature at the pigs' bucket raised his head, turned his face and looked at her ; and suddenly the good woman's fright gave way to a feeling of profound pity.

Such infinite suffering gazed at her out of those soft, dark eyes, with their long lashes and heavy lids. Such pain trembled on the thin white lips, pathetic, in spite of the coarse food which clung to them ; such privation was scored on every line of the wasted features. And over

all there was a half-imploring, half scared expression, an evident fear of her, which effectually banished all alarm from the mind of the miller’s kindly wife. Big as the intruder was, he had the look of a child who has done wrong, and fears, yet deprecates, the consequences.

As the miller’s wife still stood looking, the stranger rose slowly, came timidly towards her, and said, in a broken voice :

“Pardon, Madame, I was so hungry!”

“Poor lad,” murmured the woman, gently, as she noted how young was the face before her, with all its suffering,—“Poor lad, and you are hungry still?”

The gentle tone seemed to attract him; he lifted his pathetic eyes to hers with a look which made her feel the tears spring quickly for very pity.

“Hungry? Ah, yes, Madame!”

“Wait a moment!”

She hurried in-doors, and presently returned with a buck-wheat cake and a cup of milk. The stranger lad was still there where she had left him, but he was no longer standing upright; he leaned against the wall as though for support, and there was a strange, eager look about the eyes as though the waiting were hard to bear. To Téphany it appeared like the look she had once seen on the face of a starving, homeless dog, who had crouched to her for food, and yet, with all its need, had evidently been too gently trained to snatch it. The wild

pathos of those hungry eyes had haunted her for days afterwards.

With her kind heart swelling for very pity, she put the food into the lad's hands without a word, and stood by to see him eat it, which he began to do with an eagerness he tried hard to restrain. But presently he came to a standstill ; he set down the cup on a little stone window-ledge in the wall, looked at the remains of the cake, shook his head with a faint smile, and returned it to the miller's wife.

“Thank you, Madame.”

“What, do you not like it ?”

There was a ring of hurt surprise in the tone with which she said it ; for Téphany was a notable housewife and did not like to see her provisions unappreciated. The lad noticed it.

“Pardon, Madame, it is very good, but—I have gone so long without, I——”

He put his hand to his throat, and reeled slightly as he stood.

“Poor lad, he is faint with fasting !” exclaimed the friendly woman, all her pity returning upon her. “Come in, my child, and sit down.”

She took the dirty, ragged arm of the wanderer in her clean, plump hands, forgetting her ordinary horror of dirt, and led him into the mill.

There was a stone bench within the door, and here she

made Christophe sit, while she bathed his brow and moistened his pale lips with cold water.

Presently he sighed, and looked up with a smile.

"Ah, thank you, Madame, you are very good."

"Poor child, poor child!"

Her tears gathered, and one dropped on the dirty brown hand of the outcast.

His lips quivered. There was silence for a moment, and then he said, wearily—

"I must go."

"Not yet. You are too weak. Wait till the master comes in, and we will see about a night's lodging. Will you sit here? I must go and put his supper ready."

He thanked her with his eyes; and, as she bustled to and fro, she could see them following her movements with languid interest, as he sat there on the bench, never moving hand or foot, evidently wearied out, and feeling that, for the moment, it was well with him. The supper ready, Téphany came and stood at the door, shading her eyes with her hand and looking out for the master.

"He is late," she murmured, "late. It does not generally take so long to conduct Fifine into Morlaix with the sacks of flour, and to return. What can he be doing?"

She paused a little, looked more earnestly in the direction of the town, and tapped her foot impatiently on the doorstep.

“If Adam had been here,” she went on, talking rather to herself than Christophe, “if that lout of a lad had behaved himself, then Bénéad need not have gone. But there—what can one do with idlers? Bénéad was right to chase him out, quite right. It is awkward, though, very awkward. And with all that wheat ready to be ground. Ah!—”

She broke off suddenly with a quick exclamation of alarm, clasped her plump hands and leant forward.

“Quick! look here! What is that I see coming up the hill? Surely it is not——! Quick, I say, look!”

Christophe, thus appealed to, rose from his seat and came to the door.

The sun had set, but there was still light enough to make out the form of a white horse coming along the winding road which led up to the mill: two men were walking on either side and seemed to be supporting a third who sat, huddled up, on the horse’s back.

Christophe had made out this much, when the miller’s wife, without waiting for him to speak, flung up her hands, and darted forward with a cry—

“It is! It is! *Ah, mon Dieu*—Bénéad!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE MILLER.

“The miller, that for-dronken was all pale,
So that uneathes upon his hors he sat.”

CHAUCER.—“*The Miller's Tale.*”

“NEVER mind, wife, don't cry. I shall be better soon. It was that stupid Fifine, she stumbled; and the sacks—— Ah !”

“Yes, they fell on him and crushed his leg, madame,” continued one of the supporters, taking up the words of the injured man, who had broken off with an exclamation of pain.

“Pierre and I were passing at the time, and we took him to *Monsieur le Docteur*, who dressed and set his leg. Monsieur said——”

“Yes, he said that Bénéad Rannau would not do a stroke of work for weeks to come, perhaps months,” broke in Pierre, eager to have his turn,—

“He says, too, that perhaps the leg will mortify, and then——”

“Hold thy stupid tongue, thou great-mouth,” exclaimed his comrade, interrupting him without ceremony,—“never mind him, madame, he knows nothing about it. Monsieur

the doctor will be up himself in the morning, and it will be all right, you'll see."

"Ah, yes, yes, we'll see; we'll see," growled Pierre. "It *would* be all right, doubtless, if he had been a frugal, sober man like thee and me, comrade; but millers, thou knowest—"

He touched his mouth, winked knowingly at his companion, and broke off as he caught Téphany's eye.

"More by token, Madame, I am dying of thirst, and they *do* say you always have the best up at Monlin d'en Haut."

Téphany did not notice his insolence, she was too much occupied in helping her wounded and half-fainting husband into the mill, which they had now reached; she scarcely noticed, even, whose were the ready hands which so deftly assisted her.

The two men stood waiting within the door, evidently expecting something.

"They are still there, Madame," said a quiet voice beside her, when the miller had been assisted to bed, and his wife remained bending over him, pressing her hands together in dumb distress,—"they are waiting; can I do anything?"

She turned quickly and saw the ragged stranger standing respectfully by, with a look of sympathy in his deep eyes.

It was *he*, then, who had helped her: the waif, the

stray, who but now was disputing for a mouthful of food with the pigs !

Téphany had quite forgotten his existence ; yet the sight of him helped her. He seemed a friend—a something on which she might lean.

“ Thank you. Ah, yes, I forgot ! It is the cider. You will find a barrel in there ; ” (she indicated a door), “ draw some, please, and send them away. Jéhu is a good fellow enough, but Pierre—— ”

The shudder with which she closed, said more than words.

“ Ah ! if Marie were only back, and the boys ! ” sighed the poor woman, as Christophe turned to obey her. “ How shall I ever manage by myself to-night—all alone ? ”

“ Madame, they have gone. Can I do any more ? If Madame does not want me, perhaps I had better go, too ? ”

The same quiet voice was speaking again, almost before Téphany could hope that the errand was accomplished. The voice was so quiet that she could not guess the insults the boy had received from the man Pierre in doing her bidding, or how his companion had hurried him away for very shame. There was a wistfulness, however, in the tone with which the last words were uttered that made her pause a moment before answering. *Could* she give him the proffered shelter—now that she

was without protection? She looked at her husband, lying helpless and half insensible on the bed, and hesitated.

“If Madame would rather——” began the voice again.

Téphany turned and looked full in the lad’s face; that dark, pale, thin face, with the deep, wistful eyes and the sensitive mouth. The look seemed to satisfy her.

“No, stay,” she said; briefly, and then turned again to her husband, who had roused a little and was speaking in a feeble, querulous voice.

“All that corn!” he said, “all that corn!” How shall I grind it, Téphany? And there’s Fifine; did anyone put her in the stable? And what’s the night, Téphany? Is’t like to be windy? I can’t remember whether the sails are properly secured. Go and see, wife. But no, thou must not leave me; I feel as though I could not be alone. Yes, Téphany, the rascal was right; I’m no better than most millers, and I’ve broken my word again. Mère Furgot’s cider *is* a trifle strong, maybe, but—— Ah! if I am to die now, as that rascal said I might, Old William will surely have me. Father Paul will never give me absolution again, after—— Dost think he will, wife?”

He asked the question with an entreating intonation, as though he longed to be contradicted; but poor, kindly, jolly-looking Téphany was too much shaken to do it.

This reminder of her husband's spiritual as well as temporal danger came like the last straw: she burst into tears.

"If Madame will tell me where, *I* will put the horse in. I know about horses, we had one at home."

The lad started as the last word passed his lips; it had come unconsciously.

The miller's face relaxed.

"Ah, yes," he said, "let Adam do it—I forgot about Adam. There, there, wife, it will be all right; don't cry."

"He thinks you are Adam; never mind, don't contradict him—anything to keep his mind easy," whispered Téphany, who had followed her ragged auxiliary to the door.

"Yes, there is Fifine; they *might* have had the charity to put her in," continued the poor woman, as she saw the white horse browsing outside in the fast gathering twilight.

"Stop, the stable is round there—you can't miss it. Tie her up and give her some hay, and then—Coming, *mon ami*, one little minute only. What else did he say? Ah, yes, about the sails. Just see if they have been properly secured, and if not, do it. You will see *how*, fast enough. Yes, yes—" as the miller's querulous voice again called her—"Coming, *mon ami*. About the sails? Oh, yes, up there—you can't miss it."

She pointed to a ladder which seemed to lead to the upper storeys of the mill, and then ran back to the dwelling-rooms without another word.

The white horse raised its head as Christophe approached it, looked at him for a moment, and then, as though satisfied, allowed him to take the bridle and lead it round the mill; or rather, I should say, the horse led Christophe: for, confident that it would know the way to its own stable, he held the reins loosely and allowed it to take the lead.

A curious sensation came over the boy as he walked round the dark, tower-like building, with the horse's bridle in his hand, the rising wind on his cheek, and the wide, wild sky overhead. There was something in his occupation, in the care of the patient animal beside him, which awoke past memories in his still half-numb mind. As each memory arose in dimly-shaped, misty outline,—part separated from part, passing from his weak mental grasp as he tried to seize it, only to give place to another just as indefinite—a strange, painful thrill of reviving consciousness troubled his spirit.

For days past now, he had lived a semi-conscious life; his higher faculties had been almost wholly in abeyance, the needs of bodily sustenance alone occupying his attention. Everything had been done, as it were, in a dream, and forgotten almost as quickly.

But this evening there was a change. Almost, for the

first time since his escape from the weaver's cottage, he had eaten of wholesome food till he was satisfied ; he had felt the warmth of a human habitation pass through his chill limbs, and the genial warmth of human kindness through his chill heart. As the blood in a torpid limb under the influence of electricity, so the spiritual life within him began to stir again, and with similar thrills of pain.

“ Loïzik !” he found himself saying to the horse : and immediately the vision of a poor, patient, worn-out animal, with drooping head and troubled, suffering eyes, rose before his mind.

Which was Loïzik, this or that ? and how was it that the very name troubled him so strangely ?

He looked up at the dark, tall mass rising above him ; and, chill as was the night, the perspiration broke out in large beads upon his forehead.

It seemed to him as though he ought to see fir-trees around, and a long shadow stretching across a band of moonlight at its base.

But these were not here.

Christophe shuddered, and drew a long sigh of relief, as the horse stopped before a little out-house on the further side of the mill. This, at least, called up no haunting recollections.

He opened the door, and the animal marched in, as one quite at home, and began to munch the hay which

was in the manger. Dark as it was, Christophe managed, by dint of groping, to find the rope, slip the bridle from the horse's head, and secure him for the night. This done, he returned to the mill.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

“Uncertain as a vision or a dream—
Faint as a figure seen in early dawn.”

TENNYSON.—“*Enoch Arden.*”

THE Monlin d'en Haut was, like many of the buildings of Brittany, composed of both stones and timber in its outer walls, but chiefly of the latter. It was a well-built old mill, and had stood the wear and tear, the storms and tempests of full two hundred years; at least so said the miller. Moreover, it was picturesque as well as useful, and formed the object for many an artist's picture, as it stood up, tall and dark, many a score of feet above the town of Morlaix, tossing its great sails, like giant arms, against the sky.

The basement floor, sufficiently large to stand division into two good-sized rooms and a little sleeping closet, served as the dwelling of the miller and his family.

The first storey was larger still, and projected far enough beyond the walls below, to form a covered passage all around the dwelling floor—in mill parlance, a *round-house*, which in its turn was fenced in with timber hoardings to protect it from the open air. Here the miller

received the sacks of grain, which were hoisted up by great pulleys to the grinding-chamber ; here, also, they were lowered down again, and delivered back to their owners filled with well-ground flour ; for the Monlin d'en Haut bore a high character for its fine grinding.

A finely picturesque old timber stair-case led up to the first storey, outside the round-house, communicating with an equally picturesque little open gallery which ran all round the mill. Inside, an equally useful, if less picturesque ladder, performed the same office, leading immediately into the interior of the first storey through a trap in the floor.

Christophe hesitated a moment between these two ways of mounting in pursuance of his errand, but finally chose the inner.

Madame Rannau had lit a mill-candle during his absence, and struck it by the sharp spike with which such candle-sticks are usually furnished, into the wall of the round-house ; a bunch of keys, strung together by a piece of string, hung on a nail beside it.

Christophe took both candle and keys, and, mounting the ladder, pushed up the first trap-door, and found himself in the grinding-chamber. The great mill-stones were at rest, the huge beams and joists which supported the upper floors, no longer trembled with the heavy roll of the machinery. The whole place seemed strangely and eerily quiet.

Christophe even was struck by the stillness ; for, though he was no miller, he had several times been in a mill in the old days at home : days which now seemed strangely dim and far away, as though they had been lived in the land of dreams.

Upon everything in the chamber there had settled a fine white dust. It looked like the dust which grows of long disuse ; but in reality it was the dust of labour, the powderings of the fine white rain of meal which was ever being thrown off, like spray, by the floury cataract which flowed from between the mill-stones.

A black cat, with face and ears whitened by its researches among the meal-sacks, glared at Christophe as he passed the hopper and went on up the next ladder to the floor above.

The Monlin d'en Haut was a tall mill, and Christophe had to pass up through several other storeys, each appropriated to some particular process in the grinding of corn, before he reached the topmost chamber, that containing the mainspring of the whole, the machinery connected with the great sails outside, which set the whole of the lower works in motion. Here also all was silent.

The miller had evidently secured the sails all right before leaving the mill on his expedition to the town : for there was no motion, no sound to be heard, but the soft piping of a gently-stirring wind among the great trans-

verse bars which formed the inner skeleton of the mighty arms outside.

Christophe did his best to bring his weak and bewildered mind to the task in hand ; he ransacked his cloudy memory to call up an image of how things looked when sails were properly locked, from the shadowy impressions of past times. He tried his keys in what looked like a lock in the machinery, found one that fitted, but could not turn it further. Yes, evidently all was right.

He drew a sigh of relief, put his hand to a brow which was throbbing painfully with the effort at unaccustomed thought, and turned to go down stairs.

As he did so, a long shaft of pale moonlight fell into the gloomy room, from one of the two square windows facing each other, which pierced the wall, and from which the miller was wont to look out for the coming of the winds to turn his mill.

Christophe started. Never now could he see a shaft of moonlight fall athwart the darkness without such a start, and a curdling of the blood which turned his very heart sick. His ordinary impulse on such occasions, to turn and flee, came over him now ; but he resisted it, walked down the very track of the eerie light, and looked out of the window.

It was a strange picture of light and shade which stretched before him, as he stood there at the top of the tall old wind-mill, lifted, as it were, between earth and heaven.

Close by him, stretching black and motionless, one against the sky, one towards the far horizon, one pointing down to earth, the fourth hidden from sight, were the mill-sails, about which, whether by day or night, there is I know not what of weird power, which impresses the imagination with a sort of fascination mingled with awe.

These were intensely black, steady and motionless ; all else seemed a strange, shifting sea of light and shadow, as the clouds scudded across the sky, now hiding, now showing the moon, casting ghostly photographs of the scenes in heaven on to the receptive surface of the sleeping world which lay below. Now the roofs of the town below caught the gleam ; then it passed with gliding motion to the tidal river on which Morlaix lies, lighting up its sluggish reaches till they showed like the gleaming folds in the train of a bridal dress. Anon the light died from the water, only to live again on the dim brown moors and swelling hills which lie between Morlaix and the far sea-line, where the silver seemed to settle smilingly and linger ere it passed, like Arthur, to the Isle of Avilion, which lies, say the Bretons, in those “wan waters of the west.”

Christophe looked some moments at the shifting picture, then suddenly, as is usual with such unexplainable perceptions, there came over him the feeling that someone was standing behind him.

He turned quickly, and, as the moonlight, which had

been shut off from the room by his own face at the window, streamed again across the floor, he caught sight of the figure of a man standing in it, with his face towards the trap-door.

He was a young man, short, but very powerfully built, with thick, black hair. Of his face, Christophe could see but little, besides the outline of a long cheek and stubborn-looking chin.

He wore a miller's dress, white from head to foot. After standing for an instant with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the floor, he made straight for the ladder and descended to the lower storey, without once turning his head, or giving any indication that he was aware of Christophe's presence.

The latter, after a short interval, followed him: and then, for the first time, he perceived that the draught from the windows had blown out his candle, and that he would have no light but that of the moon to guide him down the many ladders and through the silent chambers of the mill.

Who, then, was this man that seemed to know them so well that he needed no light?

Christophe could hear him descending with unhesitating step, never once pausing till he reached the lowest rung of the lowest ladder. Cautiously following in the gloom, he himself found it no such easy matter.

Was this a grinder attached to the mill? If so, why

had Madame Rannau spoken of being alone? Why had she been so ready to avail herself of the help of an inexperienced new-comer?

The incident puzzled him a good deal; yet, such was the condition of his mind, that the new effort, required to find his way in the almost total darkness—(for the clouds passed too constantly over the moon to allow of her giving much light)—caused him almost to forget his meeting with the stranger, by the time he had groped his way downstairs again.

Very weary was the lad when he stood once more in the presence of the miller's wife. The reaction consequent on the novelty and excitement of the last few hours had set in: the fatigue of a long day was telling on his weakened body, and it was all he could do to stand upright while he reported himself to the mistress, handed her the keys, and waited to receive her directions.

In spite of her own preoccupation, the weary droop of the tall, thin figure, the exhausted ring of the lad's voice did not escape Téphany's attention. She rose immediately from her seat beside the bed of the now sleeping miller, took the candle, and led the way into a little sleeping closet.

“It is Marie's,” she said, looking half doubtfully at the dainty appointments of the tiny chamber, and then at the undoubtedly squalid appearance of the lad beside her.

“Yes, it is Marie’s; but she won’t be back to-night, and I do not know where else to put you. I have no time to make up a bed, and I must have you at hand in case of need. Good night, and may the blessed saints keep us all.”

“But, Madame——”

Christophe’s eyes had followed the direction of Téphany’s, and rested, not with doubt, but with utter consternation on the scene before him.

The tiny room did, indeed, look very unsuited to such as he. It was not that it was luxuriously furnished; far from it. Of actual furniture there was little, and that only of the usual description to be found in Breton houses, such as was the Monlin d’en Haut. But there was a spotless purity, a dainty finish about it all, from the snowy coverlet and white pillows, which gleamed from within the dark oak framework of the *lit clos*, with the I.H.S. above it, set in wreathen work of quaint old carving; to the winter nosegay of window-reared China roses, which filled the little vase below the shrine of the Madonna, opposite the diamonded window, deep set in the old wall.

The very walls themselves were white, with the dazzling whiteness of newly laid-on limewash, all above the border of dark wainscoting which extended round the room to the height of some three feet above the floor.

On a nail in the wall at one side of the window there

hung one of the close white linen caps worn by the female population of Morlaix, and under the plain deal chair with scarlet cushion which stood by the bed, Christophe could see a tiny pair of woman's sabots.

Such a white little nest, and— (He caught sight of himself in a small looking-glass which hung on the wall, and fairly started. The contrast was too great.)

“But, Madame——”

The words came from him as a sort of protest. It seemed little short of profanation that he should occupy a room like this.

But Téphany was gone; and Christophe, uttering the words, turned, to find the door shut, and he himself standing alone on the well-scrubbed floor. He glanced again at the little mirror, and fairly blushed.

Dirty, indeed, haggard with long fasting, and utterly innocent of soap and water, was the face which met his look. The darker shade which outlined the short, well-cut upper lip, might be the first sign of coming manhood, or only an intensified smudge of dirt, for all its owner or anyone else could discover; and as for the hair which hung in long black masses about his head and almost into his eyes, it was all but rusty in hue from exposure to the sun and wind, matted and unkempt to the last degree.

From his face, Christophe glanced down at his figure, and the blush became hotter.

No klaskervara could be worse than he: the rags seemed literally about to fall from him and leave him naked.

Such a tattered object! And had he stood thus before Madame Rannau?

Almost for the first time since he had quitted his home, the sense of his squalid appearance forced itself on the lad's mind and filled him with overpowering shame.

Could his foster-mother see him thus, his dainty little sister Genofa, nay even Yvonne—what would they say?

It was long since he had consciously thought much of the old home, but the sight of this little white chamber seemed to bring it back. It was just such a one as Genofa's, he thought; and with that he went forward and laid his great, brown hand, half-timidly, half-tenderly, on the snowy pillow. When he took it away, it seemed to him that it had left a mark on the fair, white linen.

He drew back in horror!

No; he could not sleep there. It was an utter impossibility.

He looked around, saw a mat, old and faded, if clean like everything else, which had been laid down inside the door to keep out the draught; stretched himself upon it,—like a dog not fit to intrude further, but which, nevertheless, is suffered at the door,—and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SON OF ROHAN.

“ She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-fleshed agaric in the holt,
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, ‘ Hence
Avoid, thou smeltest all of kitchen-grease ! ’ ”

TENNYSON.—“ *Gareth and Lynette.* ”

“ To think of all this happening since we went away !
Heavens ! I think old Mère Judith must have turned an
evil eye—(Holy Saints, that I should have said the
word !) ”

Here the speaker dropped her voice to a horrified
whisper, and hastily crossed herself.

“ But really, Téphany, it is strangely unfortunate.
First, a week’s baking all spoilt ; then the finest pig
dropping down dead ; and now this accident ! You may
say what you like, sister, but I do believe Bénéad has
himself to thank. If he hadn’t quarrelled with his bread
and butter and sent off poor Adam, we shouldn’t have
come to this pass. Nothing has gone right since he went
away, and that’s—how many weeks since ? Well,
anyhow,—*Ayol !** Téphany, say then, what animal hast
thou got here ? ‘ Tis a very pig ! ”

The speaker, a pretty, round, kitten-like girl—as

* Breton exclamation.

regards outward appearance, a copy in miniature of her elder sister, the miller's wife, but daintier, more sprightly, and altogether less what the French call *solide* in looks than she—turned hastily, and started as her eyes fell on Christophe.

The lad was diligently sweeping out the round-house, evidently putting his whole mind into his task, for he had hardly glanced up as the miller's wife passed out on her way to meet the returning members of her household, namely, her two little boys and the young unmarried sister whose home was at present under her roof.

The boys had loitered behind, and the two women had stopped with their backs to the mill that the mother might glance down the road now and again, while she poured out her tale of misfortunes.

Téphany followed the direction of her sister's eyes, coloured a little, and answered in a tone which sounded half apologetic,—

“What could I do, Marie? He turned up last night just before Bénéad was brought home, and I had nobody——”

“Bah! a klaskervara like that!”

Marie tossed her head and turned up her little retroussé nose still further, as though its delicate sense had been offended.

“Why, he's a true son of *Rohan*,* no better than one

* *Mab-rohan*—sons of Rohan—a Breton name for pigs.

of the pigs," she continued, saucily, as the newly-liberated herd ran grunting past. " And to take him instead of Adam—Bah!"

She scarcely took the trouble to lower her voice, as she brushed past the object of her disapprobation into the dwelling-rooms, whither she was followed by the miller's wife.

Animal as she might think him, and as indeed he almost looked in his neglected squalor, the lad had caught and vividly felt the girl's last remark. The hot blood crimsoned his dark skin under its coating of dirt, and he paused a moment in his willing labour of helping the woman who had been kind to him, in the vague desire of hearing a word from her in his defence. He had better have gone on.

Téphany spoke indeed, but in a voice so pitched that, had he not been listening, it would not have been overheard; yet it was evident that, not his defence, but the wish to propitiate her sister, was the motive which prompted her words.

" Ah, yes, poor fellow, he is, as thou sayest, a very pig: but what wouldst have, Marie? Ah, pardon," she continued, following her sister into the little sleeping-closet, " I did not mean thee to find out; if I had thought how dirty he was, I would never—but Bénéad was so ill, as thou seest, though he sleeps quietly enough for the present, poor man, that—that—"

She broke off, her voice drowned in the angry exclama-

tions of her sister, who had evidently discovered the black mark on her pretty white pillow.

“But, Téphany, this is shocking,—terrible! Thou dost not mean to tell me he slept in here? Yes? Sainte-Anne defend us! A veritable pig—a beast like that! Get along to thy animal, then; I must put the room to rights directly. *My room, indeed!*”

The door was banged in the face of the miller’s wife, who, hearing her husband calling her, went to his bedside, without a glance to see if her *protégé* had been within ear-shot of these pleasant remarks.

Had she looked, however, she would have found the round-house empty. Christophe had not waited to hear the conclusion of the altercation concerning him. With head bent, ears tingling, and cheeks throbbing with shame, he turned from the door of the mill, which, up to that moment, had seemed to him such a kindly refuge from misery and cold neglect.

Why had he so soon forgotten the image which last night had shocked him by its reflection in the glass? Why had he not at least tried whether cold water would make him more respectable before he had again presented his squalid countenance in the sight of a civilized woman?

Poor lad, he felt as if his foster-mother, the notable Ninorc’h—as if his dainty little sister Genofa, who was always as fresh and sweet as a flower—had spoken by

the mouths of these two women. How *they* had always hated dirt! How Genofa especially had been wont to shrink from the neighbourhood of a klaskervara!

A klaskervara! The image of his father rose before his mind's eye at the word, and he shuddered painfully. *Could* it be that he was like *that*?

There was horror in the very thought.

Tears such as he had not shed for many months, which indeed he had been too much crushed to shed, coursed down the haggard cheeks of the wanderer, as he knelt by the mossy margin of the well where Maître Rannau was wont to water his mill-horse, and tried, with hands which, it is true, were too long unaccustomed—to make his morning toilet. Round him grunted Madame Rannau's pigs, wallowing in the muddy runlet which flowed from the well, seeming (as he thought in his deep humiliation) to recognize him as a brother.

"A son of Rohan!" Yes, she had called him that, and as such even the animals owned him.

And he had dared to sleep in her room, that dainty room which was like a shrine! No wonder she was horrified.

No anger mingled with the lad's smarting sense of shame. His life for the past few years had been such as to leave no room for pride, scarcely even for self-respect; and lately, when he thought at all, it was to wonder dumbly how a creature so vile as he felt himself to be,

could be looked on by any Christian without a shudder. The words of this dainty girl were accepted without resentment, as only the simple truth ; nay, he was even conscious of a feeling of relief that she had shrunk from his outward squalor only, not from the soul's defilement, which was before his eyes continually to the exclusion of everything else. Outward soil might be washed away, but blood——

No, he would not think of that just now ; and it was a sign of his improving mental condition that a mere accident of daily life *could* come between his mind's eye and the ghastly horror on which it had so long dwelt.

What with his own splashing and the pigs' grunting, he did not hear the babble of childrens' voices coming nearer and nearer, and it was with a start of surprise that he looked up presently to see two curly-headed boys, standing hand-in-hand, gazing at his ablutions with the most profound interest.

Christophe's head was dripping with water, the drops running down from his mop of black hair into his eyes, faster than he could wipe them away with his tattered sleeve. He must have looked a comical object, contorting his grave features and winking hard in the endeavour to look at the new arrivals ; but not the slightest idea had he of this till he was startled by a peal of childish laughter from his two spectators. Then Christophe, having at last succeeded in stemming the water-drops,

stared too, and a pleasant picture it was which met his eyes.

The boys might have been about eight years old, and were perfect doubles of each other ; the same height, the same colouring, the same form of feature.

You could see at once that they were brothers and had been born on the same day ; you could see also, almost as clearly, whose children they were. They might have been modelled and painted after Madame Rannau, so much did they resemble her.

Both of them had the curly hair,—dark, yet with a bronze tint upon it, which, in the sunshine, showed like the interweaving of a gold thread—the soft olive skin with a healthy rose blooming underneath, the full red lips, and clear grey eyes, which, before her beauty had become a little too expansive and over-blown, had made Téphany Laurent the most admired among the *pennières* * of Morlaix.

And now both cherub faces were rippled over with smiles and laughter ; the eyes twinkled with amusement, the white, pearly teeth showed in a brilliant line between the cherry lips. Such innocent fun is very infectious, and before he knew what he was doing, the grave, melancholy outcast, who had thought never to smile again, found himself laughing back at them. The lad almost started at the sound of his own laugh, so strange and unnatural

* The Breton for a young marriageable girl

did it sound ; but he had no time to think of this, for, as if the spell had been broken by the re-echo of their amusement, one of the cherubs ceased laughing, and spoke.

“Who are you ?”

Seldom was a simple question harder to answer. To bury his individuality was Christophe’s chief object, and here was a child asking it of him point blank !

The lad could not lie ; though of late all idea of acting on principle had been as if null and void—it was not in his nature to do so.

But, after all, *what* was his individuality ? Did he fully know himself ? His father he knew—alas, too well ! But his mother ? His birthplace ? About all that the pillawer had been persistently silent.

“Who are you ?” repeated the boy, bent on getting an answer, “you *must* be somebody, and live *somewhere*, you know,” he added, with a sage nod of his curly head. “Mustn’t he, Allan ?”

“Yes,” answered the other cherub, decidedly, “of course he must.”

“Must I ? Well, then, I don’t ; I live nowhere—at least, not now,” added Christophe, under his breath, with a sad sigh.

He had found something he could answer, both harmlessly and truly enough.

“You live *nowhere*—you have *no home* ?” questioned

the first cherub, as if such sad facts were sheer impossibilities, quite unknown in the sphere of his childish experience.

“Allan, dost thou hear? He lives nowhere, he has no home!” repeated the child, impressively, turning to his double.

The other meditated a little, after which he said slowly, and with great conviction: “Then he’s a klaskervara. *They* live nowhere, as thou knowest, Etienne; and they’re nobodies, too. Adam said so.”

The first cherub seemed impressed. He had forgotten to take this phase of society into consideration. After pondering his brother’s words for a due space, he turned again to Christophe:

“You hear what he says, boy? You are a klaskervara, are you not?”

Was he a klaskervara? Christophe repeated the question to himself. A seeker of bread—certainly he had been that for some time past, and had found but little. He looked up and answered:

“Well, perhaps—yes, I suppose I am.”

The child seemed satisfied.

“Then I’ll call you Klasker,” he said. “There was an old man who came to the door for bread every month, one winter, and that was what we called him; he was a nobody, like you, and had no name—at least, he never told it. He’s dead now,” added the child, carelessly—“at least we think so, Allan and I, for he never comes; so you

can have his name, if you like. You'd like to have one, wouldn't you?

Christophe could scarcely forbear smiling at the child's curious appointment of him as successor to the old beggar who was dead; but it suited him well enough, so he nodded his head in reply.

"Then that's settled," concluded the little one, with a look of great satisfaction. "Would you like some bread, Klasker? Mother'll give you some if I ask her."

"Thank you, little master, she has already given me my breakfast; and now I'm going back to sweep out the round-house."

"The round-house? Ours? How droll! Allan, dost thou hear?"

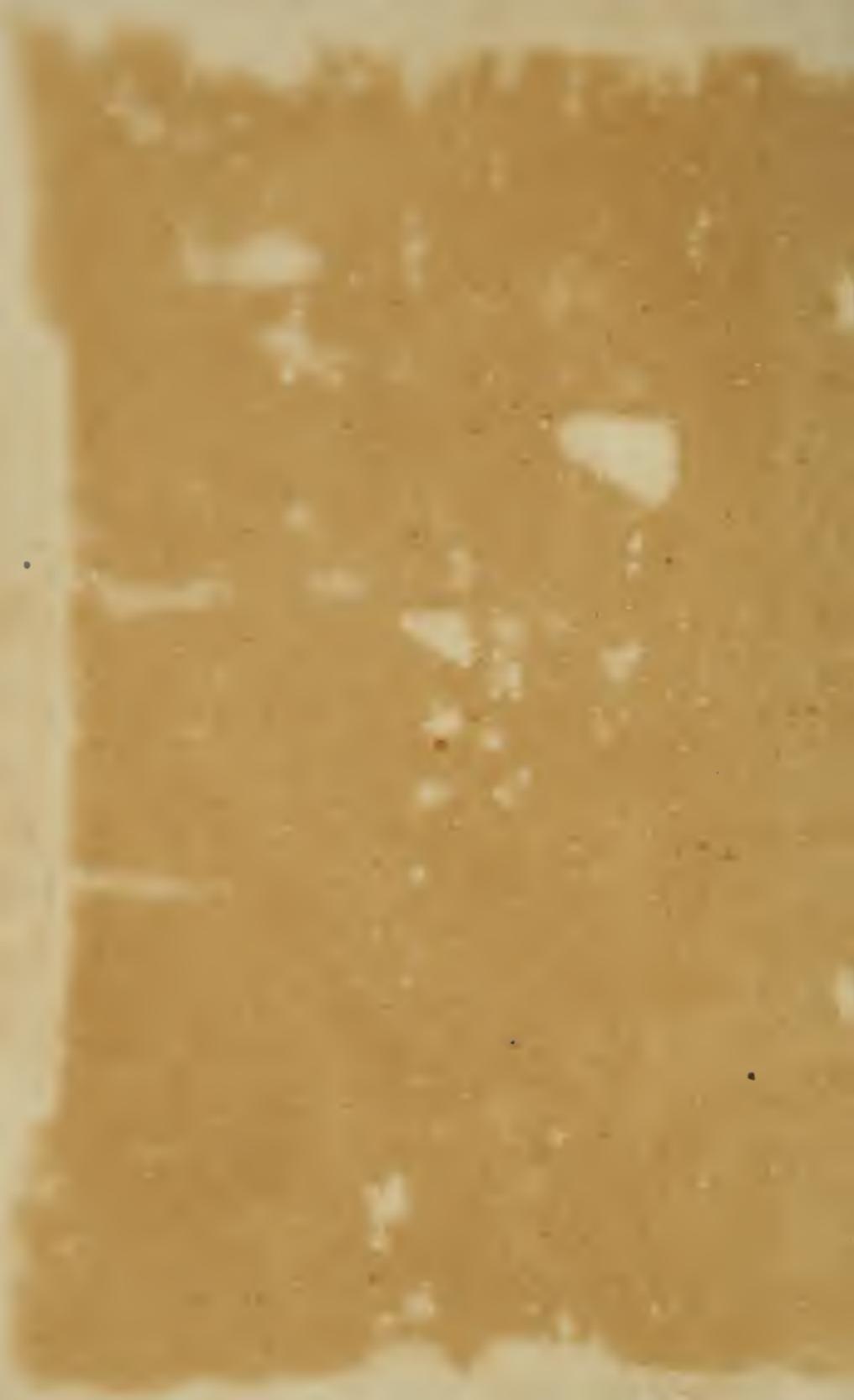
"Yes. Stop, Etienne, I want to whisper something."

This was said mysteriously, with a curious glance at the stranger by the water-trough; and then both curly heads approached very close to each other for the space of some minutes, and Christophe felt that the private conversation related to him.

"Yes, mother'll know," concluded the more talkative of the pair. Come, Allan, we'll go and ask her all about it. Good-bye, Klasker; don't be long in coming."

They nodded to Christophe in a patronising way, and then went towards the mill, hand-in-hand.





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 042681749